The Cyclic Nature of Crime and the Notion of Heredity in *Agamemnon*, *Troades* and *Thyestes*.

by

Anne Claxton, BA (Hons.)

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university, and to the best of my knowledge and belief contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

signed: 

(Anne Claxton)

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the plays Agamemnon, Troades and Thyestes are thematically related and also that there is sufficient alternative evidence to support the system of dating by sense-pauses advocated by J.G. Fitch.

The unifying thread of these three Senecan tragedies is the Tantalid line with its ongoing cycle of crime and revenge. In each play we find a family feud with the members of each present and successive generation setting out to surpass in bloodshed both their ancestors and their contemporaries. There are modified echoes of the atavistic crime of Tantalus in varying degrees but the dominant motif remains that of revenge.

I argue that there are important parallels between the Greek and the Trojan royal families, and between the races before, during and after the war at Troy, not the least in the contexts of crime and suffering.

I also examine the dramatic tensions and the psychological development of the characters within these three tragedies, and conclude that any development in Agamemnon is minimal. However, in Troades and in Thyestes in particular, there is a

tightening in dramatic form, while the psychological progressions and emotional tensions become more fully realized. I argue therefore that these plays are not static rhetoric but contain sufficient thematic evolution to deserve a higher reputation than hitherto.

Seneca uses imagery with telling effect, drawing on the example of Vergil, in particular in the stock portrayal of passion and anger. However, he adds his own philosophical doctrine, which whilst not contributing greatly to Agamemnon, has more relevance in Troades and Thyestes which I suggest lends more weight to Fitch's thesis. I discuss the role of the gods in these tragedies, and show that in this world of Tantalid revenge, that the gods have little relevance and that there can be little optimism for divine benevolence.

Introduction

This thesis examines in detail the complex themes behind the nature of familial crime and the notion of heredity within the three plays concerning the Tantalid dynasty : Agamemnon, Troades, and Thyestes.

I discuss these plays within the dating suggested by J.G. Fitch, in his thesis 'Sense-Pauses and Relative Dating in Sophocles, Seneca and Shakespeare' (1981) where he submits evidence that these plays were written in the order in which I discuss them. I find support for Fitch's thesis on stylistic, dramatic and linguistic grounds, and these are noted within the text of each chapter.

I discuss some aspects of Seneca's Stoic philosophical contributions in these plays, but I do not suggest that the plays are mainly vehicles for teaching, although there is some didactic element, and some philosophical eclecticism, particularly in Troades, rather that the philosophy should be considered as part of the dramatic movement and progression of each plot. Seneca is not freed to a great extent from his Stoic traditions, and he sees in them the rationale for sanity in an insane world where harmony with nature should be preserved, and not be compromised.

I demonstrate that the gods have little relevance, and that each member of the Tantalid family acts from free will, and makes a conscious choice to follow the path for revenge. They act from personal motives whilst deluded by ambition, greed, passion and anger and they exhibit no guilt. The notable exceptions to this pattern are not mature adults, but youths and in Troades they are not Tantalids, but Trojans. In Agamemnon and Thyestes there is the potential for the younger generation to follow the path of future retribution, and to continue the cycle of familial crime as they are motivated by hereditary factors.

I decide that Agamemnon is not as well-structured as the other plays, and that the major factors causing vengeance are the delusion of power, coupled with pride, ambition, and a blindness to the consequences of past actions.

In Troades, I find that Seneca constructs a more complex play, and that the Chorus is well-integrated, but that the philosophical notion of libera mors is given prominence. Amongst the bitter revenge between the Trojans and the Greeks there are notable parallels. It is an ambitious play, but the Trojans demonstrate that the world is a bleak place and that death , chosen freely offers a

chance of escape from oppression and tyranny.

Finally, in Thyestes, I find the most complex and tightly constructed of the three dramas. The Chorus has a dramatic and narrative relevance not seen in the other two plays to this extent, and the scenario is one which offers no comfort in a world from where the gods have fled in horror.

There are glimpses of a contemporary Roman world, but the atmosphere is one of the harshest revenge under the delusion of extreme ambition and lust for power. Wisdom obviously is an unattainable state, and human fallibility is clearly defined in a world where power is all-corrupting.

Within these three plays, I take note of the imagery and the vocabulary which is specific to dramatic purpose, and also touch on the relevant philosophical content in each drama. I find that the Tantalid family, with its past, is intrinsically important to the discussion of the familial feud, but that there is a more important message which affects mankind in general.

It is my intention to treat these plays as signs of a depressing and a growing awareness that life within the heredity and revenge motifs cannot improve, and I conclude that Seneca provides the evidence for this, particularly in Thyestes,

providing one accepts the dating frame proposed by J.G.Fitch.

A Discussion of the Cyclic Nature of Crime and the Notion of Heredity in Seneca's Agamemnon

Seneca sets his tragedy Agamemnon in the context of the events which have led up to the Greek expedition against Troy, and the subsequent victory and return of the victor with the captive Trojans. Against this backdrop he demonstrates that Tantalid crime continues to increase in the atmosphere of the revenge (190f.) which is a constant feature of the House of Pelops (169)[1].

Natural order has been overturned by the self-indulgent opportunism of the Tantalids and their descendants the Atridae (34-36), and it is this opportunism which coexists with the recurrent motifs of the breaking of fides and the lack of pietas and pudor to produce the cycle of ongoing vengeance. It is these qualities of fides, pietas and pudor which traditionally maintain the survival of mankind in the stability of a practical morality.

Furor and ira are the intrinsic catalysts for violent feud and the lack of emotional control which are features of the Tantalid line. As a result, acceptable behavioural bounds are exceeded and there is apparent the wilful destruction of social and family institutions and traditions (112-113). Cosmic disorder regularly reflects the disharmony in this particular family, and is discussed more fully below.

Importantly, in this play, Seneca portrays the gods as negligent towards the prayers of their supplicants. This raises the question of divine or human culpability in the affairs of the protagonists, and ultimately it suggests that the humans must bear the responsibility for the evil that is engendered as a result of their actions.

However, in Agamemnon, Seneca does not demonstrate the psychological progression with its associated motive of his protagonists to the extent that exists in Troades and Thyestes, and so it follows that there is some lack of initiative by the characters[2] when these dramas are compared. Yet with the concentration of the Atreid feud within the actual family, closer to its ancestral roots, the essential insatiability becomes amplified with the intensity of the original prediction[3]. It seems that there is some blurring of individuality as the characters conform more closely to the stereotype of Tantalid irrationality.

Nevertheless, there are some thematically important analogies between the Greeks and the Trojans. The recurring motif of lust[4] is a constant as is the self-delusion which blinds the protagonists to the insecurity of power and status[5]. However, Agamemnon is notable for the emphasis which Seneca gives to the 'role-reversal'

between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. It seems that Clytemnestra has assumed, in essence, the characteristics of Agamemnon prior to and during the Trojan expedition as he has been described by Aegisthus (245-248), and her behaviour has come to mirror that of her husband. She is Regina Danaum (125) and she holds sceptra...vidua (111).

Clytemnestra may fear Agamemnon's return (202-206), yet she seems blind to the dangers of her position and is incapable of insight

> Amor iugalis vincit ac flectit retro,
> referimur illuc, unde non decuit prius
> abire; sed nunc casta repetatur fides,
> nam sera numquam est ad bonos mores via:
> quem paenitet pecasse paene est innocens
>
> (239-243) 3

yet for a totally opposite view see 111-114. However, Agamemnon is equally blind on his return to his home (782ff.) when Clytemnestra chides Electra Animos viriles corde tumefacto geris (958). She has ruled without threat to her position during Agamemnon's absence and she has become too confident. Nevertheless, earlier (239-243), Clytemnestra has expressed briefly some doubt as to her position of invulnerability, although it seems to have little relevance to the Stoic tone set by the Nurse who urges her to control her passion and thus set her mind at peace (224-225). Clytemnestra

may seem to be testing Aegisthus by this sudden reversion to a high moral position here, but I find it unconvincing, given the force of her previous insistence on revenge (193ff.). When Agamemnon had been motivated by political expediency[6], and was gaining some small measure of insight and compassion during the war[7], Clytemnestra was gaining experience in power. She governed for the ten years of the Trojan war, and as Agamemnon became more aware of the instability of influence so she seems to have become increasingly seduced by the exercise of power.

Significantly, this danger is pointed up by the Chorus who use the nature imagery of the storm, particularly the gusty wind and surging water to portray the tenuous line between moderation and disaster vela secundis inflata Notis/ ventos nimium timuere suos; / nubibus ipsis inserta caput/ turris pluvio vapulat Austro, (90-93). Particularly, this applies to kingdoms Licet arma vacent...[8] (87). Already the image of the vengeful sea which mirrors the instability of irrationality is evident. We realise that the gestation of Clytemnestra's anger is commensurate with the length of Agamemnon's absence, and correspondingly it has become augmented with time.

Indeed, Clytemnestra has been isolated from

the physical carnage of battle, but emotionally she has become increasingly unstable as her adultery with Aegisthus follows the example set by her sister Helen with Paris[9]. Clytemnestra unwittingly has placed herself in a position of vulnerability with the prospect of retribution from Agamemnon, her only option being to destroy him before he can take his revenge

scelus occupandum est; (193)

Clytemnestra's marriage and her adultery can now be seen to recall the destructive Tantalid past, particularly concerning Atreus and Thyestes[10], but also they signal the magnification of the destructive feud in the pattern of its cyclic regeneration.

Clytemnestra has departed from all the virtues associated with marriage: fides, pudor and pietas, (79-81), and it is in the context of Fortuna rotat (72) that the argument for the inexhaustible cycles of the Tantalid feud and fate are combined[11]. The traditional virtues are specific to intention (285) concerning the character's accountability to others, and in Agamemnon these are desecrated from the beginning by each member of the Atreid family in turn. It is given to Clytemnestra to sum up succinctly the conscious choice of the family members in this role

periere mores ius decus pietas fides

et qui redire cum perit nescit pudor

(112-113)

Clytemnestra makes no real attempt to resolve her emotional conflict, and she lets her passions rule her conduct. It seems to be a hallmark of the irrational to give no convincing thought to personal safety as long as the destruction of the enemy can be guaranteed[12]. She has become deluded by her apparent prestige and good fortune. However, Stoic virtue seems to be attained by the knowledge of what is in harmony with nature and this requires a conscious effort to be made on a personal level[13]. Clytemnestra shows moments of self-doubt briefly (239 ff.), but she never shows any feelings of guilt or regret as a result of her violent actions.

Indeed, the conflict between reason and passion is pointed up by the Chorus with the apt use of nature imagery (90-100). Further, the reference to the intense darkness and annosa ... robora frangi (95) looks both forward to the murder of Agamemnon before the presumed sanctity of his own hearth, with the two-edged axe (897), and backwards to the death of Priam before the altar of Hercean Jove[14]. Each victim has been deceived in the assumption of safety. The gloom and the dense shadows anticipate also the grove next to the

Pelopid ancestral home[15], and Seneca's increasing use of tenebrae and nox[16] evokes the unnatural elements peculiar to Agamemnon, such as the ghost of Thyestes who causes the sun to hide its rays while he is on earth, and to Thyestes.

However, the Chorus repeats its Stoic message of moderation and notes the fickleness of fortune with its penchant for punishment (101). Ambition in Senecan Tragedy is always equated with disaster[17]. It is in this context that I find Seneca's use of cumbam (106) interesting at this stage (and with particular reference to the use of nox and tenebrae and their association with the Underworld) as it has a direct association with those deaths caused by the potent destruction of those involved with the Atreid feud. It is used most often in Latin Literature in connection with Charon when he ferries his passengers across the Styx[18]. Yet cumbam here is used as a skiff which is too flimsy to take out onto the waters of the ever-vengeful sea, and this can be tied in with the Stoic dictum that it is the lack of ambition which guarantees the path to safety.

Clytemnestra seems to analyse her emotions in an almost clinical manner which has a formulaic element in its precision[19]. There is present an objectivity which has the effect of intensifying her hatred into insanity (108-124).

Despite the almost detached description, it is the use of the imagery of fire and the reference to Medea and Helen (116 ff.),[20] which is the signal of the impending and irrational eruption of furor.

Seneca's use of the imagery of the natural world expresses vividly Clytemnestra's turbulent emotional state. It is clear that Clytemnestra's mind is comparable to the surging tide, driven by the unpredictable wind (138-140), and that she is totally out of control at the whim of her own and nature's fury

> proinde omisi regimen e manibus meis:
> quocumque me ira, quo dolor, quo spes feret,
> hoc ire pergam; fluctibus dedimus ratem
> (141-143)

Embodied in the imagery of the waves are all Clytemnestra's pent up anger, sorrow and her loss of hope. She has given up all self control, and has let her passion, like the sea and storm, take her where it will. Clytemnestra is cast adrift on the waves of her passion, tossed to and fro

> ut, cum hinc profundum ventus, hinc aestus rapit (139)

She is powerless in the grip of emotion, and is unable to see her way.

Indeed, this imagery anticipates the

picture of Agamemnon's fleet and the sails of the ships (90) returning from Troy at the mercy of the elements in the speech by Eurybates, as he brings news of his master's return (466-527). The storm of nature accompanies the storm associated with kingship

alia ex aliis cura fatigat
vexatque animos nova tempestas (62-63)

even as Agamemnon returns as

turbo quis rerum imminet (197)

with there being no doubt that the storm which the Greeks have experienced is a punishment for the atrocities committed before and after the war at Troy.

Returning to Clytemnestra, it is also through the portrayal of the destructive surging and ebbing of her inner fire and storm that the strong sense of urgency and impatience is revealed

Maiora cruciant quam ut moras possim pati;
flammae medullas et cor exurunt meum;
mixtus dolori subdidit stimulos timor;
invidia pulsat pectus (131-134)

Her emotions are confused, and the alliteration of d and p, which suggests the pounding of her distressed heart, plus the intensive exurunt (132) emphasise the depth of the burning passion. In the relatively compressed vocabulary Seneca achieves the maximum emotional effect without compromising

the portrayal of the extent of Clytemnestra's state of mind.

There are similarities in this imagery which affects both Clytemnestra and Cassandra who share Agamemnon's sexual desire. Greek and Trojan, both women are driven by furor. However, we are shown two aspects of this. For Clytemnestra her irrationality produces the striving for revenge, as in all Tantalid crime, but for Cassandra her passion is personal and affects no-one else. These women share also the appearance of pallor (237,710) and the deeply entrenched fires of delirium (Cassandra) and those of resentment (Clytemnestra)

...flammas pectori infixas ... (723)

flammae medullas et cor exurunt ... (132)

It becomes clear that both furor and ira as emotional states mutually exclude the state of virtue[21], although Cassandra's have been inflicted by Apollo. Moreover, Clytemnestra deliberately chooses her course of action and freely commits scelera (47) which are part of the Tantalid schema for revenge.

The role of the imagery of fire is consistent with the Stoic doctrine on anger[22], and lightning is a feature of the storm that smites the Greek ships (495-497) which are discussed in the stock epithet mille (171, see also 40, 430, 455).

This lightning initially is described as welcome fire

excidunt ignes tamen
et nube dirum fulmen elisa micat;
miserisque lucis tanta dulcedo est malae:
hoc lumen optant (494-497)

but it is rapidly perceived as fulmine irati Iovis (528) and as a weapon of punishment by Pallas, patron of Troy as it strikes down Ajax (535-538). There is the also notion that flame can have particular reference to the torches used at the marriage ceremonies of this family, and can also be associated with the retribution of the Furies (759-761, also 83ff.). The state of marriage of the Atridae and their kin is notable for the deceit with which it is associated[23].

Clytemnestra has surrendered herself totally to her resentment and so eventually it becomes an overpowering stimulus which precludes any rational or impartial thought. Clytemnestra suffers, cruciant (131), and the violence of her actions is directly proportional to the intensity of her emotional disturbance. This is in contrast to the Stoic doctrine whereby freedom of choice is axiomatic, and reason can restrain leadership as long as it is free from emotion[24].

Clytemnestra is being consumed by the combined forces of hatred for Agamemnon, her fear

of his imminent return, with the guilt of her adultery (cupido turpis 135) with Aegisthus together with an intense anger at her total situation. This results in the inner fire which threatens to consume her, and over which she has no control,[25] just as in the world of nature where the elements of wind and tide force the pace of destruction (138-140). Clytemnestra has been overwhelmed by circumstance, and so ostensibly she surrenders herself to chance[26] ubi animus errat, optimum est casum sequi (144) whilst she deliberately chooses evil. The patent implication must be that ambition will lead to hubris (101-106). So Clytemnestra as ruler and subject to the turning cycle of Fortune will suffer the fate of opportunist kings

> quidquid in altum Fortuna tulit,
> ruitura levat (101-102)

In her assumption of the power of kingship, Clytemnestra cannot evade the retribution of Fortune (102-107), and in her irrationality she is propelled to seek even greater crimes than those of her sister Helen (124). However, when she is resolved upon Agamemnon's murder, she ensures Aegisthus' full co-operation, and each one conforms to the pattern of their lineage: est hic Thyestae natus, haec Helenae soror (907).

Punctuation

The altercatio which follows (145-161) is anything but a standard Stoic rhetorical device as it serves to open up and clarify the issues which have led up to the present circumstance[27]. Despite the overt connotations of Stoic moral principles (144 -145) where reason might restore fidelity, Clytemnestra is beyond this argument. The pithy statements define and reveal the reasons for Clytemnestra's unforgiving bitterness to Agamemnon for his sacrifice of their daughter on the grounds of his ambition to sail to Troy and exact retribution. She relives the agony of Iphigenia's death

> Pudet doletque: Tyndaris, caeli genus,
> lustrale classi Doricae peperi caput!
>
> (162-163)

and Clytemnestra acknowledges her own shame at Agamemnon's treachery and his joy at seeking war whilst driven by the desire for familial revenge. The truism stated by the Chorus has come to pass

> impia quas non
> arma fatigant? iura pudorque
> et coniugii sacrata fides
> fugiunt aulas; (78-81)

Both Clytemnestra and Agamemnon have transgressed all the Stoic virtues in their separate quests for retribution.

Agamemnon's speech on his return to his

home is loaded with irony. He returns, he assumes, sospes (782), boasting of Trojan booty (784) whilst Cassandra faints before him. Greed and opportunism are but two basic flaws that stamp the House of Pelops, and these are emphasised by the haste with which the Greeks leave Troy properantes (422), properanti (426) which points up the Greeks' hurry to return home with their spoils (praeda 422) after the sacrifices of Astyanax and Polyxena. The initial calm seas for the departure led by Agamemnon are deceptive and ironically the splendour of the fleet will soon mostly be reduced to wreckage (497-506).[28] Hecuba's curse is fulfilled as the ships are swept by nature's chaos and confusion

> nec una nox est: densa tenebras obruit
> caligo et omni luce subducta fretum
> caelumque miscet (472-474)

There is here a strong parallel between the disorder of the sea and the internal frenzy which drives the Tantalids in their unending family feud, with its consequent cycle of destruction.[29]

Agamemnon is over-confident. He has been described by Eurybates as like a conquered man (victo similis 412) with just a remnant of his fleet remaining, yet his arrival reveals a man untouched and unchastened by harsh experience (782 ff.).

Agamemnon is shown to lack the Stoic virtue of moderation, something he must acquire through the events that he has undergone on a personal level.[30] Therefore, Agamemnon is incapable of achieving the status of a wise man. He claims to be unconquerable

> ... tibi tot barbarae
> dedere gentes spolia, tibi felix diu
> potentis Asiae domina summisit manus
> (783-785)

He is ignarus[31], blinded by his victory at Troy, and his homecoming seems to have removed any insight[32] and has robbed him of even partial wisdom. We see no moral development by Agamemnon in this play, and he, like Clytemnestra and Aegisthus never exhibits any guilt regarding his past acts of violence. Indeed, Agamemnon is scarcely on stage at all. The main picture that we have of him is that which is supplied mainly by Aegisthus, and while it is an intensely negative image, it is corroborated by Clytemnestra (174-191). Agamemnon has betrayed his marriage (244-245), and he is deluded by lust, which is a recurring defect in the Tantalid line. He is arrogant and swollen with pride (248) according to Aegisthus.It is also Aegisthus who describes him as fierce and lacking mercy, a man who will return as tyrannus (252) whereas previously he was rex Mycenarum (251).

The implication therefore is clear. The

war at Troy has engendered subsequent violence following the sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia , and this violence has caused Agamemnon to regress in wisdom. With the use of the title rex, there is the overtone of the Stoic concept of the Wise King, but it is apparent that for Agamemnon this status will be unattainable[33] when it is viewed in the context of the statement on kingship by the Chorus

O regnorum magnis fallax
Fortuna bonis,
in praecipiti dubioque locas
excelsa nimis.
Numquam placidam sceptra quietem
certumve sui tenuere diem: (57-61)

However, Agamemnon's entrance (778) as a king returning in triumph, whilst it is anticipated (204ff.) remains undeveloped by Seneca. There is though, a brief reference by Cassandra to the exultation by Tantalus, the father of this house, and to the Furies as agents of revenge with snake-like whips (anguinea iactant verbera, 760), which link the distant past with the near future.

Clytemnestra's emotions at the time of Agamemnon's arrival are not noted until the time for her violence is ripe. It may be that they are internalised and camouflaged so that Agamemnon remains unsuspecting, but Seneca denies a

situation which could exploit dramatic tension to the full. It seems remarkable also, given the lavish imagery of the banquet scene (875 ff.) that an opportunity to depict Agamemnon's return in keeping with his character was lost[34]. Cassandra is given the role of reporting the events, not the Chorus who stand outside most of the action of this play and are scarcely integrated apart from 775-781. Agamemnon wears a victor's wreath (779), arriving to the gods of his house (778) in similar ominous fashion to Priam who died at the altar of his household god (792). However, Agamemnon's tone is arrogant, with his emphasis on booty

> tibi tot barbarae
> dedere gentes spolia ... (783-784)

Agamemnon patently invites disaster. He promises votive offerings to Jove and Juno (802ff.) who have proved to be no friends to the Greeks during the storm (*fulmina* 802). The double meanings and irony in his speech with Cassandra point up his tragic naivety, and they build up the dramatic tension. Cassandra has no time for the gods and no fear of them, unlike Agamemnon, and her death will bring her the security she seeks (*mihi mori est securitas*, 797).

The events at Troy and the parallels with both Priam and Agamemnon are tightly drawn: the analogies underline the fates of both royal kings,

each is revealed in his impotence, each trusting in his gods and each in his position of apparent power. These kings both are deceived equally by a mortal gift: for one a horse, and for the other a robe woven by his wife with his entrapment and his murder specifically in mind (881-883). Agamemnon has revelled in the spoils he has taken from Priam, rich in gold and purple,[35]

> ostro lectus Iliaco nitet
> merumque in auro veteris Assaraci trahunt.
> et ipse picta veste sublimis iacet,
> Priami superbas corpore exuvias gerens
>
> (877-880)

thus anticipating a demise similar to the other royal victim with nearly severed head[36]. Priam had been slain at the altar of his god, and Cassandra does not miss the opportunity to reveal the meaningless ritual on the festal day (791) and the feast for Agamemnon's return (875). Furthermore, Helen, the catalyst for the Trojan war has returned to Greece, and her presence guarantees further destruction.

Cassandra in her prophetic furor initially sees her conqueror's murder as sweet revenge for Troy par annis decem (867), as in her mind she considers the Trojans as the victors and Agamemnon the victim. However, the enormity of

Clytemnestra's crime against her husband becomes too much for her as she describes her reaction horreo (883)[37]. Her vision also is presaged by cosmic chaos

fugit lux alma et obscurat genas
nox alta et aether abditus tenebris latet
(726-727)

Night is now alta and the sky is hidden in darkness, with the unnatural vision of gemino sole praefulget dies (728)[38], the gleaming of the sun having sinister connotations like the gleaming gold of the Trojan cups at the banquet (876). The progress of the sun had been delayed by the presence of Thyestes' ghost from the underworld, Phoebum moramur? redde iam mundo diem (56, see also 726ff.), but when it appeared, its light was to reveal the dreadful murder of Agamemnon[39]. Cassandra has been described as the bride of Phoebus (710) impotently fighting her status maenas impatiens dei (719), immediately before her prophecy of Clytemnestra's frenzied attack upon her husband. This sun is not therefore the natural lux alma (726), but can be compared to the sun which had witnessed the catastrophe of the fall of Troy (578, 742 f.).

It is in the imagery of the hunt that Agamemnon is finally destroyed as the unwary victim. He has exchanged Priam's robes for his

wife's gift, a garment which is a tightly woven trap amictus (883) which despite being loose, an indication that things are never what they seem to be, and which binds and captures him as surely as a net to trap a wild animal

> ut altis hispidus silvis aper
> cum casse vinctus temptat egressus tamen
> artatque motu vincla et in cassum furit
> (892-894)

However, Agamemnon's trust is in direct proportion to the determined madness of his wife (furens) (897). Agamemnon has been totally deceived by his perceived position of royal power at this fatal feast. Despite Cassandra's warning, his reply

> Victor timere quid potest? (799)

reveals his blindness to the reality of his situation. He is ignarus, dazzled with pride and by the gleaming gold of his Trojan spoils (875ff.). Ominously, blood is to fall into the wine cruor Baccho (886)[40]. Agamemnon is far removed from any insight which could have resulted in the Stoic virtue of self-knowledge with the lack of ambition and the gaining of wisdom.

Agamemnon's struggle to escape from the trap is impotent, the trap being a robe which is described paradoxically as loose yet tightly binding. This robe is reminiscent of the nets which

were used in traditional gladiatorial fights, and the imagery is reinforced by the stock epithet of these contests habet (901)[41]. Agamemnon is doomed. In the language of ritual sacrifice he is brutally despatched, with Clytemnestra being described as the priest at the altar[42], and Agamemnon the votive offering who in death will expiate the violence he committed prior to and at Troy. Previously the Chorus, in an unwitting prophecy has described Cassandra similarly, in the act which will be transferred though to Agamemnon

caditque flexo qualis ante aras genu
cervice taurus vulnus incertum gerens
(776-777)

The concept of Agamemnon being murdered whilst in his prime contrasts with the sacrifice of Priam in detail. This is underscored in the description of his death where his blood streams exundat (903) whereas Priam, desiccated by old age scarcely bleeds (657 f.)[43]. That Agamemnon's lips continue to move after his head has been severed perhaps may also be linked to his relative youthfulness[44].

Cassandra has no fears for her own future, and she looks on her own death as freedom and security[45] (796-797) with her thanks quin grates ago (1010). Cassandra has maintained the fortitude of the Stoic in the face of death, and

she is completely unafraid as she demonstrates the virtue of knowing how to die.[46] This attitude is emphasised by the Chorus of Trojan women

O quam miserum est nescire mori (610)

and it is on a personal level of the victory of her acceptance of death that Cassandra's triumph is complete. Her view of death is that of the heroic concept of the underworld. That she rejoices to have outlived Troy is clarified when she proclaims that death cannot now come too quickly as to the dead Trojans in Elysium she can tell of

captas Mycenas, mille ductorem ducum,
ut paria fata Troicis lueret malis
(1007 - 1008)

Thus Cassandra now draws together the threads of the motifs which characterise Tantalid crime, particularly those of deceit and the breaking of marital faith, stupro, dolo (1009).

She has seen in her vision that fata se vertunt retro (758), and that the Erinyes will pursue in retribution to the bitter end as the cycle of Fate continues inexorably, a concept which is linked to the earlier statement by the Chorus (82ff.). Cassandra's final word furor is the prophecy of the further madness of Orestes and the continuation of this family feud with its hereditary motif of revenge and destruction.

Disaster will lie in store also for Clytemnestra[47] who has demonstrated her own moral and psychological disintegration when she blames Cassandra for seducing Agamemnon and orders her death (1003) and also the murder of her own daughter Electra, rather than punishment.

Aegisthus is a key figure in the events which lead to the death of Agamemnon. The product of the incestuous relationship between Thyestes and his daughter (32ff.), he has been bred for the purpose of revenge, and his birth is motivated by lust. Thyestes' greed is indicated by the use of hausi[48] (31), and this greed is reinforced by his willingness to ignore evil non pavidus ... sed cepi nefas (31). While Thyestes blames his degradation on Fortuna, with his daughter coacta fatis (32) as he is condemned by Minos (24) yet he vows

vincam Thyestes sceleribus cunctos meis

(25)

There is therefore but a faint implication that Fortune or fate is a lottery for the outcome which will involve some of the characters, in that their future is somewhat uncertain, for example the Trojan captives, but this motif has no real link with any particular character as is the case with Hecuba in Troades[49]. Although the ghost of Thyestes blames his incest on Fortuna (28), it is clear that

in Agamemnon each member of the Tantalid family is responsible for his or her own crimes, and that they are influenced by their heredity and by the past events which have occurred in this family's cyclic feud.

Nature has been confused (34), not just by the unspeakable crimes, but by the ghost of Thyestes' avowed aim for his descendants to commit them. The dreadful feast is foretold (parantur epulae, 48), as is the treachery and bloodshed (sanguine, cruor 45ff.). Aegisthus' resolve is to be strengthened by his father as his stated purpose in the family cycle of revenge draws near. The night is prolonged by Thyestes' presence, and as he leaves, the fatal day dawns, the rebus extremum (227) for Aegisthus.

Initially, Aegisthus is capable of shame (pudor 49), unlike the ghost who seems to have forgotten his own defilement (28) and has also forgotten his admission of impiety in Aegisthus' conception (31). So the father urges the son to remember his mother Pelopia, Thyestes' own victim, and for Aegisthus to use the present situation to his advantage. Whilst according to the ghost of his father, Aegisthus is filled with self-loathing at the circumstances of his birth, he is nevertheless stimulated into action by ambition, and by

Clytemnestra's apparent change of heart towards Agamemnon (244ff.). Aegisthus calls her amens (244) in her brief intention to regain her marital fides and purity (241) by deceit, and in the naive hope of her denying her adulterio with him. The truism nec regna socium ferre nec taedae sciunt (259) cannot be overlooked[50], particularly in association with the parallel circumstances concerning Paris, Helen and Menelaus.

Aegisthus succeeds in stirring Clytemnestra from her self-deception, while he fans the flames of her furor (261) and he fulfils the prophecy of Thyestes' ghost by acting as an agent for Tantalid revenge (48f.). His argument is well reasoned (287) and it provokes Clytemnestra into a stinging attack about his birth which is said to have reversed the progress of the sun (294-296)[51], but he parries it swiftly (292 f.) However, Clytemnestra now forms her compact with Aegisthus in legal terminology

> quae iuncta peccat debet et culpae fidem
> secede mecum potius, ut rerum statum
> dubium ac minacem iuncta consilia
> explicent
>
> (307-309)

Clytemnestra has become like a savage animal. With the mutilation of her husband Agamemnon, Clytemnestra has finally emulated her sister Helen

and her treatment of Deiphobus (748-749)[52]. She is cruenta (306,947) whilst victrix (947), yet Aegisthus is described as semivir (890). I would suggest that although the traditional translation is 'effeminate', it may also in this case be translated as 'half-human' or preferably as 'half-beast'[53], as Aegisthus has indeed reverted to his heritage est hic Thyestae natus... (907)[54].

Just as Agamemnon was at Troy[55], Aegisthus similarly is an opportunist at Argos, and his propensity to fulfil his destiny as an agent of revenge within the Tantalid family is never really in doubt (52). His emotions all are negative, with his pietas to his father revealing an ambivalence of a supposed virtue in its perverted result. Aegisthus commits adultery and progresses to murder in full self-knowledge (231-233), thus he cannot be considered just a passive instrument of his father as he chooses his path and he denies the Stoic virtue of reason[56]. Aegisthus has no illusions about the gods and their role in his future destruction

> crede perniciem tibi
> et dira saevos fata moliri deos: (229-230)

Nature was flouted at his conception versa natura est retro (34), and consequently the reason that

accompanies the harmony of nature is denied in the perversion of his pietas.

Aegisthus continues in his role as tyrannus (995), and with Clytemnestra's claim that he is consors pericli (978) she echoes his earlier statement Tu nos pericli socia (234). Aegisthus reveals his own moral regression when he consigns Electra to a living death by torture (988ff.) and he acknowledges his increase in evil rudis est tyrannus morte qui poenam exigit[57] (995). Clytemnestra cannot contain her blood lust, but Aegisthus has now assumed Agamemnon's place as the decision maker in this liaison and he has become the leader in crime.

Note out of killer from this point - s/be n. 58

Clytemnestra had acted towards Iphigenia with pietas, but what was once a virtue towards one daughter is denied towards her other children Electra and Orestes. Again we see the ambivalence of pietas as this is the quality which had instigated the revenge upon Agamemnon and thus it became a negative force. Clytemnestra reveals her own psychological regression to a position of complete moral blindness when she orders the murder of Cassandra on the grounds of the latter's seduction of her husband. She is incapable of recognising the parallel of her own position with Aegisthus and that of Agamemnon, yet this is another example of the role reversal that has

occurred. The vicious assumption of supremacy by Clytemnestra and her lover leaves little hope of any reward for virtue. Ambition and opportunism have destroyed contentment, and they have paved the way for evil and for ultimate destruction.

It is Cassandra who survives to the end of the play to link the past with the present, the sea repletum ratibus eversis (1006) with the storm which wrecked the Greek fleet (408ff.). She also links Clytemnestra and the storm with the revenge for the crimes against Troy by the Greeks (1005ff.) The storm and wrecks had been described fully by Eurybates (470ff.) where Agamemnon envies Priam (514) little knowing that he will meet the same end

ut paria fata Troicis lueret malis (1008)

as in the earlier storm litatum est Ilio (577). Involved in his death is deceit dolo (1009)[58] just as the ships were lured onto the rocks through the treachery of the false beacon (569f.). Further, Cassandra neatly encapsulates verbally the dual feminine adultery of both Clytemnestra and Helen and the dual gifts of the horse (627ff.) and the robe (880ff.), thus enforcing to the end the analogies between the Greeks and the Trojans.

Orestes is rescued by Strophius, and he is urged by Electra

paternae mortis auxilium unicum (910)

to escape Clytemnestra's revenge. Yet Strophius bears a gift from Jove, the palm of triumph for safe passage (938ff.). Previously we have seen that those ad quem triumphi spolia victores ferunt (804) portend disaster. Moreover, all is not what it seems as Jove has been conspicuous as a precursor or instigator of disaster to the Greeks in this play, in particular prior to Agamemnon's death (793). Further, omen (939)[59] would seem to have a negative connotation in this case as Orestes' purpose is to carry on the family feud as Cassandra has prophesied (1012). There is also the chariot which will travel praecipiti (943) and which is effreno impetu (944)[60], which denies the presence of any moderating control, thus being a guarantee of the continuing cycle of furor, ira and revenge to the next generation.

The role which Seneca assigns to the gods underlines the pessimism which is inherent in this play, and so it is far from reassuring. The gods, especially Phoebus, constitute a constant motif in Agamemnon, and there are frequent allusions to them, but these lack the conviction of the gods being in any way helpful to mankind. Clytemnestra has denied from the outset that any god was sympathetic to the Greek cause at Aulis (172f.). Indeed she places the responsibility for the cause and effect of the ships leaving for Troy squarely

upon Agamemnon, so much so that the land drove his ships away from the shore

eiecit Aulis impias portu rates (173)

His sacrifice of his daughter before he left Greece quos ille dignos Pelopia fecit domo (165) had demonstrated his depravity and impiety, thus Clytemnestra decides that her husband is therefore deserving of her planned crime (193ff.). Even the Nurse discusses the prospective events purely on a human and not a divine level apart from mentioning Clytemnestra's defilement of the altars (218-219). However, her following statement makes it clear that any vengeance towards Clytemnestra will stem from the Greeks and not from any divine agent

Ultrix inultum Graecia hoc facinus feret? (220)

Important to include the question mark here!

Just as surely as the war at Troy was conducted from the motives of opportunism and revenge, so also will Agamemnon's death be avenged, on a familial and national level. The Nurse however, does introduce the Stoic dictum of moderation and control from which will come emotional peace and contentment (225-226), so her appeal seems to dismiss the possibility of any divine solace[61] for this family and its descendants.

The traditional plea to placate Phoebus,

Juno , Minerva, Diana and Jove (310ff.) is exhorted by the Chorus in a supplication in the form of a traditional hymn (355f.). It would seem to be in accordance with ancient ritual (378-381) and is connected with the pouring of libations. I find this ode to be deliberately archaized, and with little relevance to the action of the drama as a whole, apart from being a dramatic device to counter the high tension of the previous scene concerning Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. It also serves as an introduction for the highly charged entry of Eurybates who duly reveres patrios lares (392) in traditional fashion. However, it is ironic that while he tells the people of Argos vota superis solvite (395), the word used to describe Agamemnon (decus, 394), is one that is more often applied to the former glory of defeated Troy (624, 744) and to a quality lacking in the Tantalid palace from the outset (112).

It may be that one god, Jove, rules the others, parens (400), generis nostri auctor(404), and the universe sidera et terras regis (803), with the cosmos consisting of an organic unity. Jove is now perceived by the Greeks as angry irati (582) and responsible for the storm which afflicts Trojans and Greeks (526). He is said to have armed Pallas with his own weapons of lightning rather than her own of spear, aegis or the Gorgon's fury

(529-530). Nevertheless it must be remembered that this is the interpretation of Eurybates, thinking in the heroic terms which are conventional for him[62]. Because of this he is incapable of and has failed to discern the moral disintegration which has caused the fall of both Troy and that of Agamemnon. It is true that the supplications of the Chorus are unheeded (400ff.) as is that of Agamemnon (802-807), and it is significant that the latter event is followed immediately by Agamemnon's murder. Clytemnestra is proved correct in her assumption of the events at Aulis

non est soluta prospero classis deo;

(172)

and she seems justified in her lack of belief in the gods.

There can be no tension here. The gods are to be seen as mainly outside this drama, existing as bystanders in the conventional sense, with the disasters that befall being due essentially to the emotional flaws of the characters and their lack of moderation or reason. Phoebus' role would appear to be as a symbol of nature, the sun, and as such he signals natural order or the lack of it. The ghost of Thyestes from Dis is unnatural and causes disorder in the natural world

Phoebum moramur. redde iam mundo diem
(55)

Phoebus also is used in a calendar sense to note the length of the Trojan war

post decima Phoebi lustra devicto Ilio (42)

the ten years of revenge, strife furor and greed. Aegisthus has claimed Phoebus as the source of his birth Auctore Phoebo gignor (294), only to be ridiculed by Clytemnestra with the question quid deos probro addimus ? (297). It is clear that Phoebus had been driven from the skies in reaction to Thyestes' incestuous act (295ff.), an echo of the ghost of Thyestes gnatis nepotes miscui - nocti diem (36) who proclaims his paternity beyond doubt

causa natalis tui,
Aegisthe, venit (49)[63]

The Tantalid family heaps crime upon crime, upsetting the natural order of the universe, and it is deceptive (fallax 57) Fortune which has the responsibility for maintaining any moral stability or otherwise.

Dramatically, Agamemnon is episodic, with no one scene flowing smoothly into another. The Choral odes mainly seem set apart from the plot, especially the Hercules ode (808ff.), and the resultant lack of unity and cohesion seems to suggest that this play, on stylistic grounds was written prior to Troades and Thyestes. Perhaps this

theory is reinforced by the lack of any psychological progression by the characters towards wisdom, apart from the Trojan Cassandra whose comments are fated to be ignored.

From the outset, ira, furor , deceit and opportunism are the important motifs which motivate this family whose members are culpable for their evil actions which they engender towards each other. In this way the deeds of the Tantalid family are reflected in the disharmony of the natural world, and chaos seems never far away. For the House of Pelops, traditional moral values exist only to be flouted. The family feud continues to revive the atavistic need for the continuing cycle of revenge, and there can be little or no optimism for the future of this family.

NOTES

1. See 39-44. The treachery will rebound on Agamemnon and continue to affect future generations (cf. Thy. 46- 53).

2. See the chapter on Troades, especially the assertion of free will by Polyxena and Astyanax, also note 61 from the text of that chapter. Perhaps this lack of psychological development provides some support to Fitch's thesis. See J.G.Fitch, 'Sense-Pauses and Relative Dating in Seneca, Sophocles and Shakespeare' AJPh 102 (1981) 289-307.

3. See Ag. 22-52, also Thy. 21-53.

4. Agamemnon for Briseis and Cassandra Tro. 303f.,978, Ag. 182-187, 254 ff., Helen for Paris Tro. 908-909, Clytemnestra for Aegisthus Ag. 234, and most pervertedly, Achilles for Iphigenia and Polyxena Tro. 360-365.

5. Ag. 57-63 cf. Thy. 451 ff., also A.J. Boyle, in Book 6 206.

6. Ag.162 ff. Tro. 248-249.

7. Agamemnon blamed his past deeds on the impulse of youth whilst ruling his kingdom, Tro. 258-263, yet he breaks marital faith with his wife and lacks pudor in his lust for Briseis and Cassandra.

8. The strength of emotion against reason is a strong Stoic concept, particularly in Seneca's writings. For some insight see Ep.CXIV 32-34, De Tran. An. 11,7-8.

9. Just as the result of Helen's infidelity was the total destruction of Troy, so the Atreid legacy will consume and destroy Clytemnestra's sanity.

10. Specifically the marriage between Atreus and Aerope and her subsequent adultery with Thyestes.

11. See Boyle op. cit. 204 for his theory on history's moral order.

12. cf. Thy. 190-191.

13. See Ep.CXXIII 16, Nemo est casu bonus., see also Ep. L, 7-9.

14. cf. Tro. 45-54.

15. See Thy. 650-656, also Vergil Ec. II.3 densas, umbrosa and the link with passion.

16.Tenebrae, used in association with nox has traditional overtones of the infernal regions and lack of natural order: cf. Thy. 1094, Tro. 283-289. See Vergil G. 1,248. In Ag. see especially in this context: 472,493-5,727.

17. Vergil (G. 1, 199-202) in his imagery of a skiff emphasises the physical and mental strength needed to avoid disaster, but Seneca stresses the mental aspect of lack of ambition (103-107).

18. Horace Odes 2.3,28, yet cf. Thy.592.

19. See Tro.642 ff., also Thy. 260 ff.,423ff. but

for examples in epic poetry cf. Vergil A. IV 534-552, XII 666ff.

20. These women have broken the sacred bond of marriage, and Medea has wreaked hideous revenge upon Creusa, Jason and their sons (Med. 880ff., 1009-1010).

21. cf. Ag.117-118, Thy. 27,Tro.903-904.

22. See De Ira II 5, also note 8 supra.

23. Traditionally Agamemnon is known for lust, see Iliad I 181-187, 318-348.

24. De Ira I.7.

25. cf. Vergil A. IV (509-520) for a similar notion. However Seneca's description is more comprehensive, especially see De Ira I,3-5.

26. The simile of the skiff ratem (143) can be applied equally to the similar dilemma of Thyestes Thy. 436-439, and it is a traditional simile, see Vergil G. I (199-203).

27. Yet R.J. Tarrant Agamemnon (Cambridge, 1976) in his commentary (p. 202) sees it purely as notable 'for a high proportion of gnomai' as in the Octavia 25.

28. cf. Tro. (994-995)

29. cf. Thy. 4 ff.

30. See Ep. CXXIII. 16

31. cf. Aeneid X, 501. See chapter on Troades note 29.

32. See Tro. 257-285.

33. See De Cons. Sap. 4.v.4 Sapiens autem nihil perdere potest;... nihil fortunae credit, bona sua in solido habet contentus virtute,....

34. See Tarrant op.cit. 318 note 778 f. This omission and lack of development may lend further weight to Fitch's thesis on dating.

35. cf. Vergil A. IV,129ff. the gold and purple of the hunt.

36. cf. Vergil's description of Priam's death A. II, 558.

37. cf. Ag. 167 with Calchas similarly shuddering at his own prophecies. See also Thy. 639 for the recoiling of the reporting messenger.

38. This idea can be found in Euripides Bacchae 918f., also see Vergil A. IV 469 ff.

39. cf. Thy. 645 for the reference to the columns of the Pelopid ancestral home gleaming in the sun, also Tro. 1140 ff. for the notion that the sun shines more brightly prior to darkness. Perhaps this idea could be expanded further to compare the darkness to the unnatural gloom of the Underworld and also to the Pelopid grove.

40. cf. Thyestes 915

41. In the prologue, daturum ... iugulum (43) can have gladiatorial as well as sacrificial connotations, see Ep. XXX.8.

42. Proportionally there are more references to

altars in Ag. (166,219,585,645,776,792 x 2, 898,951,972) than in Tro. (45,780,1107) or Thy. (95,464,684,693,706,726,742,1058).

43.cf. Tro. the death of the young Polyxena whose blood subitus recepta morte prorupit cruor/per vulnus ingens (1156-1157), also Tro 50 on the paucity of Priam's blood.

44. See Thy. 728 f. on the death of the young Plisthenes, Vergil G. IV 522ff. and Ovid Met. VI 557ff.on the death of the youthful Orpheus for the same idea, perhaps related to youth.

45. The philosophical ideal of libera mors is developed as a major theme in Troades.

46.cf. Polyxena Tro. 1137 ff., Thyestes in Thy. 442

47. Orestes will continue the theme of family vengeance.

48. hausi (31) implies the act of drinking to the dregs, or draining a cup.

49. See Tro. 56ff.

50. cf.Thy. 444 for a similar notion although it refers to the sharing of the throne between Thyestes and Atreus.

51. This recalls the speech of Thyestes' ghost (53ff.)

52. See Vergil A. VI,494f.

53. Refer to O.L.D.

54. Tarrant op.cit. note 889 prefers the former

translation, but in the context of the frenzy of stabbing by Aegisthus I suggest the latter is more fitting.

55. Tro. 330ff.,350ff.

56. Ep. XLII.4, LXVI.32,33.

59. In Tro. 488, Seneca uses omen in the context of Hector's tomb, again in a negative sense.

57. cf.Thy. 247 perimat tyrannus lenis, also Tro. 329

58. cf. the deceit which caused the final destruction at Troy dolos (632).

60. See note 25 supra and Clytemnestra relinquishing control (141-144).

61. cf. Ep. LXXV,18. Ep. LXXVI,16,17.

62. Perhaps Seneca is suggesting that the role of the gods is mainly in the realm of superstition which is counter to the Stoic notion of moderation in accordance with nature's needs Ep. IV,11.

63. See Boyle op. cit. 202-203 on Phoebus' involvement.

A Discussion of the Cyclic Nature of Crime and the Notion of Heredity in Seneca's Troades.

In Troades, Seneca's presentation of the downfall of Troy after years of prosperity and ten years of war (73-74,134-137,591)[1], he reveals in the attitudes of both the victors and the vanquished[2] many aspects of human fallibility including opportunism, vengeance and the lack of fides and pietas. The scenario can be placed within the context of the hereditary feud which afflicts the House of the Atridae[3] and its continuation, which both contaminate those who become involved with this family, and which results in the expansion of the cycle of death and destruction.

It becomes obvious in this play that within the wider context of Pelops' family, culpability belongs to the humans, and not to the gods. It is the family which constantly rekindles the evil central to the disaster at Troy. Furor, revenge and deceit are fundamental to the self-perpetuating feud and cycle of Tantalid crime[4]. The foundation of the city of Troy was itself founded on deceit[5]. These three elements combine to amplify the protagonists' perspective of experience in evil[6], and they produce a nexus of destruction which typifies the Atreid feud.

Importantly, within the setting of the Trojan war, Seneca draws attention to the parallels between the Greeks and Trojans, their motivation and the consequences. There are significant events

which frame the warfare, and the lack of awareness of the true causality of the conflict affects the future of both races, and these ensure that the attrition will be unending.

However, it would be an over-simplification to claim that these are the only themes in Troades. The issues which Seneca includes are complex and also they embrace selected elements of his philosophical beliefs to illustrate his chosen concepts of the families, their histories and their fates. Each noble family also is representative of its race, and Seneca points up many analogies, apart from their overt hostility, between the two. In this way, we are made aware of the depth of the human misery which has been engendered by the destruction of Troy. Both Trojans and Greeks suffer equally in the expression of ineradicable passion which is integral to the Tantalid heritage.[7] This flaw, Pelops' legacy, with its Janus- like quality of reaching back to Tantalus and forwards into the future, is a pervasive contaminant which links both Greeks and Trojans. Thus it seems that the only relief from it in Troades is to be found in the Stoic concept of libera mors which Seneca presents.

Seneca has refined both the Socratic view in which desiring death is a self-indulgent

freedom[8], and Cicero's ambivalence on Stoic principles[9], and in this way he lessens the moral dimension of suicide by leaving the purpose of the individual as a rationale. Thus the tenets of the Old Stoa have become modified so that death, in this tragedy, becomes the final assertion of freedom for Astyanax[10] and Polyxena. It is apparent that the way in which death is faced becomes more important than the method of death, and Seneca makes a direct progression obvious when he shows Astyanax more positive as he ends his life sponte...sua (1102) compared with Priam who accepts his death without a struggle (41ff.), rather than directly exercising the last freedom of his will. Polyxena also accepts death boldly (fortis animus 1153) each of them

letum mente generosa tulit (1064)

In Troades, Seneca suggests that his philosophy gradually becomes more defined within the context of the strengthening of the bond between the generations. That descendants are an extension of their ancestors perhaps may be seen as another form of immortality, especially within the context of memory. I would propose that this philosophical progression is an important and deliberate Leitmotif of Troades, and that it is largely absent from Thyestes and Agamemnon. Common philosophical parallels do exist within these three

dramas, but they present aspects ranging from personal vendetta to the rationalization of behaviour[11].

The history of the violence of Pelops' line is well known, but in an important parallel with the Greeks, similar characteristics are generic to the family of Achilles[12]. Indeed, Pyrrhus loses no chance to taunt Agamemnon

> Nempe cognati maris:
> Atrei et Thyestae nobilem novi domum
> (340-341)

Seneca has pointed up the hereditary nature of passion from Achilles to Pyrrhus (250ff), whilst he does not deny that environment is capable of influencing reaction[13], and we see Agamemnon similarly admit to the fears of shifting circumstance and of unreliable gods (262). This is an aspect of the lottery motif[14] which may be applied to members of both the Greek and Trojan royal families, and it is introduced at the beginning of the play by Hecuba as a timely warning

> ...non umquam tulit
> documenta fors maiora, quam fragili loco
> starent superbi. (4-6)

This statement is important by virtue of its position, and its application to other characters is discussed below. Troy and its royal family were

destined from their origins which were based on the breaking of fides, to be destroyed. Intention is an element essential to the virtues of fides and pietas and both connote the relationship of one person to another or a group, besides being fundamental to legal marriage[15]. Aside from these, another factor which guarantees the annihilation of both the city and the royal line is their association with the House of Pelops[16], with the presence of Helen as the catalyst for Atreid revenge.

The alliance of the brothers Agamemnon and Menelaus, is in Troades, represented by Agamemnon, but they both are acting with deliberate intention to destroy those they consider a danger to their complete supremacy in accordance with the Atreid feud, and the struggle for revenge. Menelaus had been the instigator of the war against Troy, but Agamemnon at last proves his willing partner as ordained by Atreus[17] in setting in train the sequence of slaughter and he continues the theme of revenge which dominates this play. Agamemnon may be seen mostly an exemplification of furor, although he does have some brief time of wisdom immediately prior to his argument with Pyrrhus (250ff.). However, ultimately he proves his capacity to destroy utterly from the motive of revenge, but also he demonstrates traits of barbaric

opportunism when he surrenders Polyxena to Calchas (350-352)

... potius interpres deum
Calchas vocetur: ... (351-352)

and earlier (332). Agamemnon is above all, pragmatic.

It is the common element of furor that drives both families. In the setting of blazing Troy, its destructive fiery imagery (16-20,55-56,101,445-448,561) is apposite to the turbulent emotions which also rage out of control. For the second time, it is Achilles' own passion (irati 190ff.) which demands compensation for his excesses in battle, although they are seen through his eyes as achievements, in terms of the threat[18]

... non parvo luit
iras Achillis Graecia et magno luet:
(193-194)

Achilles is the archetype for Pyrrhus (219-233,236-237,251-252), and in Pyrrhus we see the representation of concentrated aggression (cf. 45-48) as he threatens Agamemnon directly

... et nimium diu
a caede nostra regia cessat manus
paremque poscit Priamus. (308-310)

In this Greek family as in the Atridae there will be an ongoing cycle of violence that is

enmeshed within the nature of heredity. Agamemnon, according to Pyrrhus' argument, owes to Achilles and the Greeks the sacrifice of Polyxena (244-249) as a precedent has been set[19]. So yet again, both Greeks and Trojans possess one more situation in common: both royal houses are to lose a daughter in the religious ritual of sacrifice (1152ff.) in the context of opportunism.

Enforcing the parallel, Pyrrhus applies the same specific ritual language to Iphigenia, immolasti (249) as to Polyxena, immolari (331). Polyxena is to share Iphigenia's destiny, to gain favourable winds so that the Greek fleet can sail to Troy with one virgin's death, and they can leave Troy after the duplication of the ritual

Dant fata Danais quo solent pretio viam (360)

Iphigenia and Polyxena are further linked, Greek with Trojan, in the context of false marriage (248), and for this second union it is given to the Greek Helen with her reputation for infidelity to prepare the bride. The exemplary Trojan wife and widow Andromache, then puts Polyxena's marriage into its framework of destruction (890-902), and she condemns it for the sham it is.

The irony is enhanced by the use of legal language[20] to suggest the solemnity and the legally binding nature of the contract

ad sancta lecti iura legitimi petit

(877)

Nevertheless, it is not just death nor yet the pointless sacrifice of their promise which are the the common factors for Polyxena and Iphigenia. Both are associated with a false marriage, and both these marriages involve Achilles. For Iphigenia, he lives whilst she dies, but for Polyxena the result would be a travesty of matrimony, with both expected to share the afterlife (942ff.), if the heroic interpretation of the underworld is accepted as valid in her case (see infra).

Furthermore, Seneca has described Polyxena in the traditional address of a prospective bride felici ... thalamo (873-874), a perversion which is apparent in retrospect[21]. A deliberate delusion has been provided by Seneca's use of felix in this play when it is connected with marriage, but then it comes to connote death and disaster (145, 146, 160, 161, 162, 284, 470, 701, 873, 953, 958, 977, 1019). Attention is thus focussed on the nature of the destiny that is meted out to those who have been encouraged to feel secure in their hopes. To extend this hypothesis, therefore, it could be suggested that ultimately the inevitable death that results from the reversal of aspiration might be seen as

good fortune or otherwise, depending on whichever philosophy is embraced by those concerned.

If this assumption is accepted, then it follows that this use of felix is apposite to Seneca's concept and presentation of libera mors in Troades. Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, had been untouched by the Tantalid feud before she was killed, and her situation can be compared to that of her father and uncle before they were contaminated, a theory reinforced by her status of innocence[22] and which is shared by Polyxena in particular.

The imagery of nature in the form of a storm at sea represents the vengeance that occurs between Greek and Trojan, Trojan and Greek, is central to the theme of Troades. However, it is mainly subliminal rather than obvious. Finally, it is Hecuba's curse (1007ff.) by which our attention is focussed on the events which are to occur after the Greeks leave Troy, as fitting punishment for their crimes and devastation of the city. However, it is not the Greeks alone, but also their Trojan captives who suffer at the hands of nature.

The winds that are necessary for the ships to arrive at and to leave Troy are an essential ingredient of the action of the sea, because to obtain these winds, the deaths of Iphigenia, Polyxena and Astyanax are required (331f.

360f.552f.). It is Achilles who demands the price of Polyxena's blood for his tomb (195-196), and until he receives that which he sees as his due, the sea will remain quiet with the winds stilled, and the fleet becalmed

> tranquilla pelagi, ventus abiecit minas
> placidumque fluctu murmurat leni mare
>
> (200-201)

Ominously this travesty of a wedding is underlined in the imagery of the sea as

> Tritonum ab alto cecinit hymenaeum chorus
>
> (203)

At the beginning of the play, Hecuba has touched upon certain former allies of Troy when it was great, Rhesus, Memnon and Penthesilea, and she has noted the relationship of each with their rivers as they meet the sea (8-13). Perhaps this suggests that although destruction this time has come from the sea, in future, vengeance might be gained from it.

Achilles' son, Pyrrhus taunts Agamemnon with his scant regard towards the sea (203) in relation to the lineage of his father Achilles. He mentions certain places laid waste by Achilles (230), and like Hecuba earlier, he notes the relationship of each part with its own sea (226-228). Indeed, Pyrrhus stresses his own relationship

with the sea via his birth and lineage (Thetide aequor, 346), and it is Calchas' duty to state the price for favourable seas and winds for the fleet to set sail for Greece, not just Achilles' appeasement, but his demand for Polyxena's death

tum mille velis impleat classis freta (370)

When the Chorus muses on death (374), it states that death, while affecting everything includes even that which is washed by the sea caeruleis Oceanis fretis (383). This is fine irony as the Greek ships, scudding the surface of the sea in parting, will soon have many of their number at the bottom of the deep. These ships will be scattered by the wind and the stormy seas (sparget 1043) as

terra decrescit pelasgusque crescet (1048)

when fallen Troy is left behind.

Just as Hecuba and Pyrrhus have noted certain aspects of both people and lands with the sea, so does the Chorus, when it dwells on its dangers (814-819,822,828,837-847). Polyxena's false marriage is noted in vocabulary suited to Pyrrhus and in particular to his relationship with the sea

te magna Tethys teque tot pelagi deae
placidumque numen aequoris tumidi Thetis
suam vocabunt, te datam Pyrrho socer
Peleus nurum vocabit et Nereus nurum

(879-882)

However, it is an illusion, like the suggestion of such a marriage. Later, the Chorus describes legendary disasters that have occurred at sea (1024-1033), and this follows a general description of the perils of the deep (1024-1033). The thousand ships of Iliadic fame are named (1030) also at 27,274,370,708,1007 as a stock epithet for this fleet, and it is clear that for them trouble will lie ahead. In the context of the danger of the ocean there can be no easy passage (1029-1033,1042-1049) and the ships will be driven agitata (1042) in all directions in accordance with Hecuba's curse.

In Troades, only the marriages between Priam and Hecuba, Hector and Andromache share the specific quality of fides. However, it is not the marriage between Polyxena and Achilles alone that is sinister[23]. Helen had left Menelaus for Paris and so had provided the impetus for Atreid attack and revenge. Helen also is involved with the deception that is part of Polyxena's sacrifice. Polyxena had been promised marriage with Pyrrhus (864-865), Achilles' son, and so the twin elements of infidelity and the seduction of trust between the Greek and Trojan families are combined with negative consequences. Thus, in the most obvious parallel between the two royal virgins, (245-247,

360-361), Seneca presents the combined reversal of normal values together with the perversion of motivation. Traditionally, in normal marriage, virtue is joined with beauty, and new life should result. In Troades we see the negation of this ideal, and the unions of Polyxena, Iphigenia and Helen have become barren paradigms for destruction.

There is also within the notion of Greek marriage in particular, in Troades the shared element of possessiveness. If it is accepted that for the Atridae marriage was equated with possession, then the latter assumes dominance in Troades, and it stimulates the revenge motif that is integral to the cycle of crime and the inheritance of their house. The god-incited revenge and greed of the Iliadic Atridae and their foes is part of Greek legend and it has been absorbed into and disseminated by later Roman literary tradition with appropriate modification[24]. Menelaus' motive of ceaseless vengeance against the Greeks suggests that he sees Helen as property which has to be regained whatever the cost. For Achilles also, Polyxena may appear to be part of the spoils of battle[25] and also as the prey which is expected of such a victor (292) whose father Ilium vicit (235), and this destructive force is seen as a contribution towards the total devastation of the kingdom of Troy. The apparitions of both Achilles

and Hector parallel each other even though the symbolism of the conqueror and conquered, Greek and Trojan is made clear by the contrast in appearance between these two heroes.

Achilles appears in his prime, alert and full of vitality at dawn when vicerat noctem dies (171) and his presence is proclaimed with no doubt by the Greek Talthybius vidi ipse vidi (170), whilst nature reacts violently and visibly, with the earth shaking[26]. There can be no disbelief at his appearance, and it is true that it is accepted without question by Pyrrhus, Agamemnon and Calchas (292,293ff.,360ff.). It is a terrifying experience for Talthybius as nature reacts

> tum scissa vallis aperit immensos specus
> et hiatus Erebi pervium ad superos iter
> tellure fracta praebet ac tumulum levat
>
> (178-180)

Hector, meanwhile appears to his Trojan wife quietly during the night (438), fessus ac deiectus (444), worn with battle like a faded wraith, and with a similarity in sadness to Andromache (450). The contrast of the downcast Hector with that of the forceful Achilles could not be greater. Before Achilles' appearance, the Chorus has reflected on the idyllic existence of Priam in Elysium, thus presenting one view of death and the afterlife,

appropriate to the appearance of Achilles in his prime.

nunc Elysii nemoris tutis
errat in umbris interque pias
felix animas Hectora quaerit.
Felix Priamus: (159-162)

The emphasis by position and repetition of felix underlines the happiness of those in Elysium because they have been removed from the cares of the world. Also Hecuba urges the Chorus

non est Priami miseranda mei
mors, Iliades
Felix Priamus dicite cunctae:
Liber manes vadit ad imos,
nec feret umquam victa Graium
cervice iugum (143-147)

Prior to Hector's dream-like apparition, the Chorus has denied the existence of an afterlife[27] such as Priam enjoys, and discusses death in Lucretian terms and claims that they are

rumores vacui verbaque inania
et par sollicito fabula somnio (405-406)

It would seem that the vision of Hector is to be viewed in a similar way, and it is true that Andromache is the only witness to his appearance in her sleep. Andromache herself draws attention to the two apparitions (436,685), and by doing so she stresses their differences, that Achilles has the

power to alarm all the Trojans, whilst Hector alarms just herself (434-436). The persona of each vision is forceful enough, however, to issue orders which are carried out by the persons concerned without question, and it is clear that to both recipients the apparitions appear to be valid expressions of the dead person.

It is Seneca's choice to present Troy and its inhabitants as victims of Atreid revenge, and to use them as symbols of the catastrophe that will result. However, there is another contributing factor. Polyxena may also be seen as a focus for and a threat of Trojan resurgence, giving Agamemnon and the Greeks some political pretence for demanding her death (350 ff.).

Agamemnon is no novice to this particular form of ritual slaughter[28], at tuam gnatam parens / Helenae immolasti (248-249, also see 331), and he is again motivated by the desire for the Greek ships to sail. However, despite the pressures placed upon him, Agamemnon does feel some apprehension (375-378) about the slaughter of Polyxena and with his comment

Et nunc misericors virginem busto petis?
(330)

he reveals a fine distinction between the living

and the dead Achilles. He also is capable of some limited insight regarding the dangers of autocratic power (257-270)[29], and he shows a temporary understanding which enhances the speculation that he might be able to resist this second evil and thus achieve the attributes of the Stoic wise king (271-287)[30]. His initial calmness and his brief attempt at philosophical reasoning with Pyrrhus support the theory that Agamemnon has indeed progressed a little towards wisdom (271-285), and he acknowledges his retrospective guilt

in me culpa cunctorum redit (290)

Yet, whilst noting his abuse of power as a feature of his own lineage, Agamemnon proves too weak to apply his newfound wisdom, and he is seduced easily by petty argument which prevents any progression in his logic. Agamemnon had seen the analogy between his position and that of the former Trojan king, Priam (270), together with that of the Greek people with the defeated Trojans

stamus hoc Danai loco
unde illa cecidit (265-266)

However, Pyrrhus also becomes no sapiens as a result of this confrontation, and his taunts become increasingly pointed following Agamemnon's accusations of his cowardice and lust (330ff.). The resulting destruction of Agamemnon's introspection in almost childish altercatio (330 ff.) is brought

quickly to a climax. Agamemnon is needled by Pyrrhus and responds immediately in kind, and by renouncing his briefly held noble ideals so he reveals his character to be incapable of any permanent change. He is unable to maintain lasting wisdom, and the brief check to his furor is removed.

Thus the parallel between Iphigenia and Polyxena is sealed (360-361) when Agamemnon breaks the impasse by removing all responsibility from himself to Calchas interpres deum (351), and to forces beyond his control fata... (352.) Agamemnon's desperate ambition for the Greek fleet to sail has triumphed over virtue, and Calchas pronounces the augmented price that the Trojans must pay for this second Greek departure: not just one death, but two (370).

With this abrogation of authority under pressure applied by Pyrrhus, Agamemnon has regressed in wisdom in philosophical and in real terms. Agamemnon's situation mirrors that of Priam left ille tot regum parens/ caret sepulchro (54-55). It would seem that any restraint that he had learned from the suffering at Troy has not touched him deeply enough. Agamemnon remains ignarus[31] as he has gained nothing from past experience.

However, Agamemnon's moralizing has

produced some psychological tension into this cycle of crime and vengeance, but neither the high ideals nor the tension are sustained.

It could be argued likewise that for Achilles violence was nothing new, and that following his close contact with Agamemnon in the Trojan campaign he too became shamefully depraved.[32] That he should return from Dis to exact the same style of marriage with Polyxena as that with Iphigenia fits the requirements of Tantalid crime: the quest for unending revenge, even from the underworld[33].

Priam, with his many sons, was the representative of Troy at the zenith of its power and prosperity, enjoying by his own interpretation the correct exercise of his power that which he thought would bring lasting glory. However, Priam cannot avert the course of his destiny. Like the Greek Agamemnon he remains *ignarus* and has failed also to understand the impermanence of greatness, but also he has allowed Helen to live in Troy, the person who attracted the avenging Atridae to him. Hector's death assures the destruction of his city as he was *Columen patriae, mora fatorum* (124). Hecuba explains that the one cannot be separated from the other

> tu praesidium Phrygibus fessis,
> tu murus eras umerisque tuis

stetit illa decem fulta per annos:
tecum cecidit ... (125-128)

That they both are denied their ritual burial is interpreted by Agamemnon as due to hubris

violenta nemo imperia continuit diu (258)

and in Stoic terms this may be viewed as justification for the end of former power (259ff.)

Hecuba's statement (4-6) noted supra reinforces this Stoic concept, and it contains sentiments common to the plays concerning the Atridae and to much of Seneca's philosophy[34]. Hecuba may seem to be fixed in the epic past in her attitude to the divine hostility (29-30, 56) from Troy's patron gods. However, although she sees herself as a prior Cassandra (37) she is unable to perceive the Atridae as the true agents and the cause of Troy's defeat, and she blames herself

meus ignis iste est, facibus ardetis meis
(40)

Yet this neat construction ignis ... ardetis also encapsulates the inherent ingredient of the furor which spurs on the crime of the Tantalids.

This paradigm of self-blame dominates Hecuba's comprehension as eventually she moves from a general acceptance of the role of fate to a more personal rationalization, and then she loses all hope (1165) when the cycle of destruction seems

final. However, Hecuba still embodies, as does Andromache, the ideals of *fides* and *pietas* towards her family and her city (117-129), as with Priam, each one the personification of the other[35]. She remains proud while her gods are *deorum numen adversum* (28). Meanwhile, she continues to threaten the Greek fleet despite noting the divine impotence *superos... - quid precor vobis?* (1004-1005). Yet still she continues to use the ritual language of religious petition *precer... precor... sacris ... precabor* (1005-1006,1008) as if it has been ingrained through years of habit.

Hecuba's *pietas* towards her gods was entrenched within her being no matter what treachery they had shown, and it is only when all hope of saving her daughter and grandson has perished (1167) she sees the harsh reality that has occurred and she declares

bellum peractum est (1168)

Hecuba now believes that any prayer is worthless and the future has become as uncertain as any lottery (56-58 cf. 981-982). This lottery motif is a constant thread running throughout *Troades*[36]. It is associated with Hecuba, and it is introduced by her with the complaint that the gods are insatiable, *Non tamen superis sat est:* (56). She claims that it is because they fear her so much that the Greeks prefer to allot the remnants of

Troy by the lottery urn (56-62). Thus Hecuba is able to tell the Greeks that all threat from her has been removed, and that they can now seek their departure in safety (1165) optata velis maria diffusis secet / secura classis (1166-1167).

It is left to the random selection of the urn to decide the fate of the Trojan captives. Only Cassandra, by reason of her madness is exempt (977), and she is called felix by Andromache. Helen, likewise denied her fate by lot (917) but because she is to return to Menelaus, has the hated task of announcing the result of the lottery. However, Hecuba again recognises the perversity of her destiny when she learns that she is awarded to Ulysses

regibus reges dedit (982)

but she delights in his misfortune

interim hoc poenae loco est:
sortem occupavi, praemium eripui tibi
(997-998)

Hecuba provides the link with this motif throughout Troades[37], and she unites the destiny of the remains of the formerly proud city in her degradation at the whim of fate.

Hecuba's comprehension of the insecurity of power (1-7) allows her to put Troy's fate into its correct perspective (41-43). She retains her

dignity despite her grief[38] which is expressed convincingly (43, 85, 96, 1060 ff.). She remains steadfast and she does not vacillate nor supplicate as does Andromache (657,691), and she remains mater of Troy (63,95f.) and is acknowledged as such by the women

...vulgus dominam vile sequemur: (81)

She has, moreover, sufficient spirit to taunt Pyrrhus and invite him to complete the annihilation of her family (999ff.), and with her curse, albeit retracted

ite,ite, Danai petite iam tuti domos;
optata velis maria diffusis secet
secura classis; (1165-1167)

she gives to another cycle of destruction the potential to become complete.

Hecuba realizes that her position now mirrors that of the city: she is but a pale reminder of the personification of Priam's greatness (1176-1177).

Hecuba's role seems mainly to be that of witness to the crimes suffered by those whom she holds dear (288ff).which include the murder of Priam[39] at the altar of his patron god by Pyrrhus (44-54, cf.137-141). Hecuba is a victim of circumstance. She is preoccupied with the past life of Troy, and like Priam is cast in the Iliadic heroic mould: they both accept their fate rather

than taking any positive action to avert it. However,[40] Hecuba is not totally passive, but she retains her regal position and her only power to cause trouble and harm to her enemies

> ...hoc classi accidat
> toti Pelasgae, ratibus hoc mille accidat
> meae precabor, cum vehar, quidquid rati
>
> (1006-1008)

It seems that both she and the other helpless widows have become the living symbols of the now extinct Troy. Thus these women lose their personal identity and they are acknowledged with the generic captivae (63,1178). As vulgus...vile (81) they supply the picture of total desolation which follows any war, but their suffering is not over, as is that of the city, and it will continue on the journey to Greece[41]. These captives, Hecuba's Fidae casus nostri comites (83) will suffer by their proximity to the Atridae, and their pain is compounded by their negative emotions as they weep for Hector and their present condition (96ff.).

When her anger is spent and exchanged for sorrow (1164-1176), Hecuba's earlier furor is transformed to become similar to the dying ashes of Troy (30, 85f.) when it is compared to its former glory (14) and she looks to her bleak future (1176-

1177).

Previously, Hecuba had recognised that Priam was near to death by virtue of his old age (51-54), and more significantly, that his trust in the gods was misplaced (140). It could also be implied that if the the Atridae had not orchestrated his downfall, then the gods would have destroyed him by another method. That Priam outlived Hector, whose duty it would have been to bury him[42], emphasises that Priam was indeed a spent force in living and dying. Priam had become ineffectual, vivax senectus (42), an embarrassment to his previously proud city as Hecuba feels when she leaves Troy for Greece (1176).

Nevertheless, Hecuba also has come to believe that death abolishes suffering (142ff.) She has moved away from her earlier grief for her husband and son (98,130 f.) to confirm that in Elysium Priam has been spared from seeing duos...Atridas (148), and he has been spared also the indignity of capture by them.

Andromache's beliefs in the Heroic concept of Elysium echo those of Hecuba. She also acts in a similar manner to the women of her generation in her acceptance of destiny. For Hecuba, her son had represented Troy's future (124-125), and likewise for Andromache it was to be found in Astyanax but with a subtle difference :

She believed that Hector had commanded her in a dream to save her son

... natum eripe,
o fida coniunx: lateat, haec una est salus
(452- 453)

Andromache, like Hecuba, has witnessed the loss of her husband[43], but whereas Hecuba's defiance is tempered by grief (949), Andromache takes positive action to try to save Astyanax. She is driven by two compelling but opposing emotions: from fear of Ulysses and from pietas to her husband. Both forces prove too strong for any resistance as she sees in Astyanax an idealized Hector spes una Phrygibus (462). It is Hector's appearance in a vision to his wife which has promoted her hope for Astyanax but it is in the deceit of a living death. As with any deception or the breaking of fides in this play there can be no benefit. Andromache's pietas to the dead Hector proves to be stronger than that for her son, and it has been reinforced by the apparition of her husband in her vivid dream.

Importantly, however, it is also her pietas towards the dead Hector and her geminus timor (642) that has sealed Astyanax's fate

non meus post fata victoris manu
iactetur Hector (654-655)

Andromache confirms her belief in the concept of Elysium and so she sends her son to his father in death (799-801). Therefore it seems logical that she would obey her dead husband's command, and she would have no choice but to salvage her husband's tomb from the proposed Greek sacrilege (668).

However, Andromache does strive to save her son, though technically and dramatically she has anticipated her son's death, and by the use of her husband's tomb as a hiding place for Astyanax (488,603ff) he is denied any chance of survival.

Although this ruse may seem rather contrived,[44] as a dramatic device it does add to the suspense of the play and it also provides an opportunity to expose fully the stock psychology of Ulysses. Ulysses, practised machinator fraudis (750) can see through Andromache's deception because of her innate fear despite her adamant denial

animosa nullos mater admittit metus

(588)

The desperation of both protagonists in this argument can in no way be compared with that between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus. It reveals fully the mismatch of experienced cunning with the naivety of Andromache's marital and maternal pietas. However, the determination of Andromache should not

be underestimated. She tries defiance (686-759) using the frenzied imagery of an Amazon (672-677) but she quickly realises that unlike Hecuba (56-62, 997f. 1006ff.) she has no further influence to harm the Greeks, and that her fight to save Astyanax is hopeless.

When Ulysses points out her true weakness to his men (677-678), Andromache attempts to sway him and to save her last hope by supplication. Her use of ritual language preces... pias (694) and referral to the gods underlines the uselessness of this approach : the gods have proved to be no friends of Troy. When Andromache realises that her son cannot be saved, she manages to regain her dignity (787-780) but she retains her bitter sarcasm towards Helen whom she blames as the cause of Troy's downfall (926ff.).

The proposed sacrifice of Astyanax is far worse than any deceit. It is nefas (668), the act of Durae minister sortis[45] (524) . Astyanax is never referred to by his own name, and the terms used to describe or to address him tend to be epithets. In particular they look back to Hector and Priam, and so also they seem to look forward to the survival of the soul; perhaps in Elysian terms rather than to absolute nullity.

Punctuation!

The use of the verb frangit (798)

emphasises particularly that Astyanax is alter ego of Hector in death (1110-1116, 1117). We see how Seneca suggests that within the context of memory there is a strong bond between those who live on, and between those who have perished (130f., 443-474, 647-660,784-785). It is this link down through the generations that also is a feature of Atreid crime [46]. Calchas sets the tone by referring to Astyanax as Priami nepos Hectoreus (369), and Ulysses is emphatic in his frequent note of Astyanax's royal lineage (528, 535, 536, 544, 551, 554, 605) with his apparent potential for retaliation against Greece : Astyanax is futurus Hector (551) and only his death will bring freedom from the fear of his line (554) for the Greeks. Andromache, on the other hand, tends to emphasise Astyanax' innocence and youth, and she most frequently addresses him as her son [47].

Both Andromache and Ulysses share a common fear for the future of their dynasties in the forms of the young Astyanax and of Telemachus (593) who had been left in Greece as an infant at the start of the war. However, it is the earlier statement concerning Agamemnon's son Orestes (555) which has reinforced Andromache's fear of Ulysses' ruthlessness. With his skill in duplicity (613), Ulysses is able to detect and to exploit Andromache's terror which he has exposed (607-631),

but he has needed all his cunning to extort the truth. It is Ulysses' unwavering perseverance in his threats (663-664, 685) that has convinced Andromache of his obduracy, and she confirms her fear of being trapped by his cunning in her use of the language of being caught up and fettered (nectit 523, nectat 928).

It can be no coincidence that her dream follows the Chorus' expression of disbelief in any afterlife (400ff.), and so this vision of Hector which directly follows this ode can be considered par sollicito fabula somnio (406).[48]

Andromache in her despair longs for her own death (577) but she is kept from suicide by her pietas towards her husband and son (642ff, 418f) : her life was to her, surety for Astyanax (599ff). However, Andromache finally is ready to die (937), but her destiny is to be what she and Hecuba desire least : a lonely future far from home (1169) with only their memories to sustain them.

There can be no reprieve for Astyanax, vota destituit deus (770). Hector's ghost had indeed proved fallax (460) as had the hope it had given to Andromache for saving her son. All slaughter of the Trojan royal family by the Greeks takes place at Troy: none of the direct line, apart from the doomed Cassandra, lives to leave the city.

Thus it is fitting that the final tower still standing is the one that has witnessed the past glories (1068-1074)[49] and is the high place from which Astyanax, the representative of the city's future, is ablated.

So the links between the generations and the tower are clearly stated (1068-1074) together with its connection with death[50], and so the irony surrounding the sacred ritual of the Trojan Games is suggested (778). Similarly, the memory of Troy's past greatness is removed, and it is reduced to faded memories analogous in Lucretian terminology[51] to the smoking ruins of the city (1050-1055,392-395).

Andromache's anxiety has signposted the destruction of Troy, but also it highlights the feeling of insecurity which the Greeks have, and also their fear of future retribution

> post arma tam longinqua, post annos decem
> minus timerem quos facit Calchas metus,
> si mihi timerem: bella Telemacho paras
>
> (591-593)

It is the repetition of timerem that emphasises the fear of the long feud that so far has produced no guarantee of security for the victors. Again the criteria for Tantalid destruction which combine furor, revenge, heredity and the cyclicity of crime are fulfilled[52].

Troy had been threatened previously when Priam was young (718ff) and it had been reprieved by Hercules. The Chorus reflect on this when they refer to Priam as bis capte senex (133-135). There is an obvious parallel at this point between Astyanax and his grandfather when he faced the siege of the city, but Astyanax unlike Priam is not given a second chance. In the second siege Hercules' arrows have completed the destruction of the city of Troy.

Death is an inescapable end to life, but Seneca in his portrayal of both Astyanax and Polyxena provides the option of death as a means of freedom from fear and misery[53]. The other remaining option was the yoke of slavery (747), from which Priam had been spared by death (147)[54] and which Helen claims to have suffered during her years at Troy (910). These two royal victims share many similarities in the manner of their dying, and although Polyxena dies boldly and without fear, it is Astyanax alone from all the Trojans who takes his own life.

In this way, he epitomizes his own concept of libera mors as he leaped from his own free will (1102). Just as the notion of heredity is important in the crimes of the Atridae, so Astyanax follows his grandfather in his atavistic

acceptance of his fate. However, he is more positive than Priam as he is intrepidus animo (1093), when he kills himself deliberately.

Astyanax would appear to believe in survival after death in the Elysian form, and this would provide an answer as to why he eagerly embraces death in the hope that he will join his father and grandfather. His mother, Andromache, would be comforted to some extent as she has often asserted (500f.,519-521,683ff.799f.), that the Trojans and especially Hector who have been killed, do live on in the afterlife. She tells Astyanax

Troia te expectat tua:
i, vade liber, liberos Troas vide (790-791)

Therefore it may be presumed that it is this belief which gives Astyanax the confidence to leap to his death.

Despite his youth, Astyanax as befits his lineage is described as ferox (1098) in the metaphor of the hunt. He is intrepidus animo (1093), and

qualis ingentis ferae
parvus tenerque fetus et nondum potens
saevire dente iam tamen tollit minas
morsusque inanes temptat atque animis tumet
(1093-1096)

and this description emphasises his youthful vulnerability. It also aptly points up the impotent

youthful pride and fierceness of a small cornered animal who is not prepared to surrender (1093 ff.)[55]. He leaps from where formerly, held in the safety of Priam's arms he had watched his father's bravery (1071-1074), and now he has mastered his former fear (503-504 cf. 792).

Priam had been sacrificed brutally at the altar of his patron god[56], which was an offence against his age, his position and the trust he held in his gods, but he perished without the benefit of either priest or ritual (44-48). Astyanax, who although he had been addressed in terms suitable to a sacrificial victim (iuvencus 795)[57] by Andromache and with priestly ritual (1100-1102) has managed by an act of defiance to deny the satisfaction of the ceremony's conclusion to Calchas and the Greeks.

Andromache is able to recognise that death frees Astyanax (791), but she is transfixed in the traditional formal ritual that she knows, and she is concerned for the proprieties.

Moreover, Astyanax has denied his mother the last comfort she seeks in preparing him for burial

> quis tuos artus teget
> tumuloque tradet ? (1109-1110).

Just as to Andromache Astyanax resembled his

idealised father when he lived (464-468), so in death he looks like the mutilated Hector, deforme corpus (1117), and so the resemblance is completed[58].

Polyxena, Hecuba's totus...fetus (961) is the last to die[59], and so she represents the nadir of Hecuba's hope of comfort in captivity. For the death of both victims, the crowd behaves as if at an entertainment (1076-1077,1125-1126) and despite magna pars vulgi levis / odit scelus (1128-1129) the witnesses seem hypnotized as terror attonitos tenet (1136).

Polyxena also is described as decus (1144), an attribute she shares with Astyanax (766) and also with Achilles (876); but the latter is debased by his demands for her life, while she maintains her moral dignity. Her courage commands the total sympathy of the spectators (1147), indeed, the crowd exhibits a crescendo of emotion until even Pyrrhus seems reluctant to kill, a facet of his character that is new (cf. 44-50, 249), but one that is not sustained. The Trojans see in her death partem ruentis ultimam Troiae (1131), and Polyxena is described in the imagery of the sun, candescent before it sets, a vivid analogy with the last moments of blazing Troy.

The use of fulgent (1138) and splendet continues to emphasise the heat of the destructive

force of furor with premitur (1142) intensifying its brightness with the indication of the overwhelming darkness that Polyxena will meet in death, and which is paralleled by the burnt out rubble of Troy. The traditional flaming imagery of this marriage torch is perverted with its direct application to the fates of Polyxena and her city, as Andromache points out

quid igne? thalamis Troia praelucet novis (900)

Although the sacrifice of Polyxena may seem to be described in a climax of fire, like Astyanax she is unafraid, animus...fortis (1146 cf. intrepidus animo 1093) and ferox (1152), and she is also assertive in her dying prona et irato impetu (1159).

However, Polyxena, unlike the younger Astyanax, would seem to have no belief in an afterlife, and she seems to see death as nullity. She is happy to die (945ff.), and surely if she were to join Achilles in the Underworld there would be no joy in death for her. So then we see two differing points of view on what occurs to the soul after death. However, they do not exclude each other. Conditioned by his mother, Andromache, Astyanax still clings to the old beliefs of the heroic world which bring comfort.

Polyxena, though, with her view of death as total extinction of the soul[60], avoids both marriage to the living Pyrrhus and to the dead Achilles. For Polyxena, death is an escape, bringing libera mors, yet she feels no sorrow for those she leaves behind, in particular Hecuba. Polyxena can be thought of as analogous with the fallen city of Troy, and regarded as free from any future suffering in her extinction which brings her the freedom she desires.

Notably, Seneca uses the same verb and tense cecidit (1158)[61] to emphasise the finality of Polyxena's last act as for Astyanax (1158): both act positively but like Priam and Troy they both perish as a result of Atreid intervention[62]. Just as the tomb of Achilles drinks all Polyxena's blood, saevusque totum sanguinem tumulus bibit (1164) so is Hecuba's prophecy fulfilled

cinis ipse nostrum sanguinem ac tumulus sitit (957)

Helen, as the catalyst for the Atreid revenge upon Troy, is presented as the archetypal deceiver, a symbol for the negation of marital fides[63], and like Agamemnon she remains ignarus. Helen stands apart from the Trojan captives, and her moods are of selfish introspection and of ambivalent loyalty (911-913, cf. solus occulte Paris / lugendus Helenae est... 908f.). Helen also

stresses the notion of Polyxena as property in the context of marriage dotare thalamo (874), ironically due to the kindness of the gods (872) who are no friends to Troy, and in her blindness Helen continues this theme presenting herself also as property (praedae 920).

So we return to the motif of possessiveness which stimulates the god-incited revenge and greed of the Atreid feud (see supra). The irony of Helen's comment profuit multis capi (887) is applicable not only to her own fate (923f.) but also that of the Trojan women. It is Polyxena alone who will benefit from the oblivion of the death that is presented by Helen (881ff.) and furthermore, Polyxena's body will remain behind in Troy (971).

With the constant analogies between Troy and its royal family, a bond is forged between the three generations of the Trojan royal house. It is strengthened with the laments of both the victors and their captives (1160-1161). With the deaths of the royal children, Priam and Hector have been denied any extension of life after death through the living memories of their offspring. Although Hector lives on in Andromache's dreams (441-460), he has no child to keep his name alive as has Achilles (293-294)[64]. Pyrrhus and the Greeks will

remember and glorify Achilles as part of their victory at Troy, but Hector to Andromache is fallax (460), weary and careworn in his defeat as she recalls him (449).

Indeed Polyxena totally, and Astyanax to a lesser extent represent the philosophical progression from the concept of Elysium to the Stoic acceptance[65] of death ipsaque mors nihil (397,869)[66]. That Polyxena and Astyanax resemble their ancestors in physical appearance and by their acts as do Agamemnon and his brother stresses the importance of heredity in this play. The cyclicity of Tantalid crime is confirmed, and the perversion of philostorgia[67] is a constant, given the nature of the feud arising from Pelops' House.

Troades begins and ends in grief, and the tragedy illustrates a preoccupation with the nature of death and the afterlife. Different concepts are discussed, and the Chorus concentrates the atmosphere of grief by clinging to its misery[68]. It is removed from any spontaneity, and by taking refuge in the formal rites of lamentation (70ff,99-105), the remaining populace intensifies the picture of desolation that Troy has become. In this way we see how the fragmentation of a people and its social structure produces and supplies a vehicle for philosophical discussion and exploration. In the episodic structure of this

play[69] devastation is underscored, and so all sympathy is elicited for the plight of the people of Troy, both as a group and as individuals.

It becomes clear, however, that the quality of life becomes the rationale for libera mors and the important issue is the attitude of those who choose to meet their destiny with honour. After they weep for their city, these Trojan women move from the security of well-known heroic definitions of Elysium (157-164) to Lucretian musings (400[70]), unlike Andromache (799 ff.) who remains locked in her past views, and they dismiss their former ideas as rumores vacui verbaque inania (405). It is the cumulation of degradation which has made this philosophical evolution possible. The mythological notion of the underworld is now denied (402-406) and the finality of death is to be seen at the end in the terms of Epicurean negative logic

Post mortem nihil est ipsaque mors nihil

(397)

Within Troades three examples of life after death are portrayed: that of survival in Elysium (159,180ff), of memory (293ff), and through the person of descendants. There is no reason why any of these views should exclude the other concepts of the after-life. As a dramatist, Seneca is no pansophist, but he is eclectic in his

philosophical views. What remains important is that each concept of death marks a step in each persons' philosophical progress according to need.

After the deaths of Polyxena and Astyanax the prophecy is fulfilled (529), and there is nothing to prevent the Greek ships from leaving Troy (551-553). With the removal of any future for the Trojans and their city, the Atridae have demonstrated in the ten year siege the excess and imbalance which is characteristic of Pelops' legacy. Despite being caelitum egregius labor (7), Troy has received no protection from its gods and has fallen for the final time.

Astyanax and Polyxena in their choice of freedom illustrate the Stoic virtue of euthymia, and in this way they appear moral victors over the self-perpetuating cycle of Tantalid crime.

NOTES

1. arx illa pollens opibus et muris deum,
gentes per omnes clara et invidiae gravis,
nunc pulvis altus, strata sunt flamma omnia
superestque ... (478-481)
cf. Tro. 134-137,591, Iliad 2.295

2. Agamemnon voices the realization of the wastefulness of waging war (276-279). See also the comments of D.& E. Henry, in Book 23, 14 i

3. Tro. 341, cf. Thy.18-20, also Ag.37ff. See also Tro.66,70ff.,1133-1136 which points up the link of Helen and Paris with the House of Pelops.

4. See Thy.23-48 cf.Tro.341

5. Tro.7 caelitum egregius labor. See also Iliad5:638-651. Laomedon broke his word to Apollo Neptune and Hercules, thereby initiating cause for revenge.

6. This Leitmotif has been noted in the discussion of familial crime, Thy.44-47, Ag.80,112,196-197,241ff.

7. Tro.341f.,310. It is self-perpetuating and it lives on in the minds of future generations. Cf. Thy.40-48, also regione quidquid impia cessat loci/ complebo Thy.21-22 where it looks back to Tantalus.

8. Phaedo 61B- 62D cf. Ep.LXX 4-6, De Prov.6.7. See also J.M. Rist, 246 ff. Also an attempt at

rationalization by Pyrrhus Tro.329

9. Cf. Cicero,De Rep.6.15-16 with De Off.1.112

10. Cf.De Prov.7 Ep.XCII 31

11.Tro.182ff. 237-238,cf. Thy.193ff.,and especially Ag.193-201 Tro.327-348, Thy.176-180, Ag.201-202

12. Cf. Tro.999ff. especially vultuque torvo... with ...torvus armasset manum. Cf. Ag. 209f. referring to Achilles at Troy. Also see Iliad XXII:330-404,XXIII:20-26 and Aeneid II 491. Cf. instat vi patria Pyrrhus

13. cf. Tro.504ff. , De Ira II xviii-xix

14. This lottery motif is introduced 56 ff. and is discussed in text infra

15.Tro.453, Hector's appeal to Andromache and Tro.502 fideli, and for associated legal terminology Tro.877 also cf. coniugii sacrata fides Ag.80

16.Tro.917-923 causa bellorum ff., Thy. 29ff.

17.Thy.325-327 ...sciens...sciens....Note the emphasis by repetition

18. This is reinforced by the position and use of the verb luo at the end of these two lines. Fantham in her Commentary (237-238) notes the connection here with The Iliad. cf. Ag.165

19. Cf. merita(244) spoils due to Achilles with the theme of debt for perverted virtue meruit(210), also ...facta expeto (249)

20. This ritual language points to the destruction.

See also: 877,248,249, 331

21. D.& E. Henry,op.cit.121 see felici... thalamo (873-874) as a true reflection of Polyxena's happiness at her approaching death. However, it is her spirit that is laetus (945) when she learns that she is to be killed. (cf.967 Polyxena is envied in her security of oblivion.)

22. For the intrinsic evil of Agamemnon and Menelaus see Thy. 312-327

23. Within this context compare the relationships between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra Ag.156ff, Polyxena with Pyrrhus (Tro.864-855) and Achilles with Iphigenia (Ag. 159) and Polyxena (Tro.195-196)

24. See Iliad II:110-113, Aeneid II 413 ff. but as stated, Seneca in this play moves culpability from the gods to his characters, as in Ag. and Thy.

25. Pyrrhus names his father as the outright victor and thus he is entitled to the spoils of war, although Pyrrhus transfers the blame of looting the city to Agamemnon (235-236,331-360). For praeda as booty see Ag. 422, and as prey see Thy.501,663.

26. Cf. the movement of the earth at momentous times, see Thy. 262ff.

27. See P.J.Davis 'Death & Emotion in Seneca's Trojan Women' Latomus (1989) 306

28. See Ag. 170. cruore ventos emimus, bellum nece!

29. See also the comments of the Chorus Ag. 101-

102, and earlier Ag. 57-59, cf.De Brev. Vit. XVII 4.

30. cf. De Clem. 1.II.3 ff. Also see N.T.Pratt Seneca's Drama(Chapel Hill,1983) 73 where he claims that Seneca gives the audience the freedom to concentrate on psychological tensions.

31. cf. the reaction of Turnus,Aeneid X. 501 who remains like all men nescia... fati

32. The insatiable cruelty of Achilles was well known and demonstrated in Iliad 22.330ff.,23.19-26

33. See the prologues of Ag. and Thy.

34. cf.Ag.57-76,101-102, De Brev.Vit. XVII.4 ...omne enim quod fortuito..., also Ad Marc. XXII.3 ... nihil est tam fallax.... Cf. Ep. LXX 17f.

35. For further development of this statement see J.G.Fitch in Book 17, 72-73, also his note 8.

36. This lottery motif is barely touched on in Ag. & Thy.

37. the vocabulary specific to this lottery motif rather than its application to fate see urna 58, sortitur 58,sors 62,sorte 554,sorte 917,sortem 972, urna 974,sorte 976,sorti 977,sortitor 982,urnae 982, sortem 998

38. This is not to deny her other emotions: pride (8-13), grief and suffering (117 ff.,) and guilt (38-40).

39. See Ag.448 cf.Aeneid II.557,. For a typical pictorial representation see the Attic Red Figure

hydria from Nola (Naples 2422) in J. Boardman, Attic Red Figure Vases (London,1975) pl.137

40. For a similar notion see J.G. Fitch op. cit (1974) 81, yet W.H.Owen,'Time & Event in Seneca's Troades' WS4 (1970) 127 sees Hecuba as completely passive.

41. See Ag.493-522

42. Ad Marc.. 1.2 the natural law is for children to bury parents, also M. Colakis,'Life after Death in Seneca's Troades CW 78 (1985) 150-151

43. The use of amor (Tro.588, 803 is specific to pure family love, whereas at Tro. 304 amore is used solely in the blazing imagery of Agamemnon's lust.

44. S. Bonner,Roman Declamation (Liverpool, 1949) 163

45. In this instance, sortis is fate (see hanc fata expectunt (528) and it bears no relation to the lottery motif connected with Hecuba supra. cf. Fantham's translation 158 [E. Fantham, Seneca's Troades (Princeton, 1982)]

46. See Ag. 32-36, Thy. 280ff.

47. see 452, 462, 503, 556, 562, 761, pueri (755), but on behalf of Hector see 456, and as his line, 461-462, 592, 602, 748

48. See P.J.Davis, op. cit. 306

49. cf. Ovid, Metamorphoses XIII, 415-417 cf. Aeneid II 460 ff.

50. See M. Wilson, in Book 6 44-46, also see his note 40. The tower was also connected with the Trojan Games (778ff.) cf. Aeneid V 604 ff.

51. Lucretius, D.R.N. II, 129ff., III, 452 ff.

52. See note 7 supra 50. See G. Lawall, 'Death & Perspective in Seneca's Troades' CJ 77 (1982) 244 .

53. In Troades Seneca regards suicide as the supreme act of freedom, cf. Ag. 589-592. Cf. Ep. XXIV.10, LXX

54. Cf. Ag. 134 where Clytemnestra calls her love a yoke of slavery, also Tro. 338, when Pyrrhus accuses Agamemnon of enslaving the Greeks at Troy.

55. Cf. Thy. 708 for a similar context within Atreid crime, also see Iliad V. 161, for comparative use of the metaphor of the hunt.

56. See note 37 supra.

57. Cf. Ag. 367 the sacrifice of the pure animal coniunx candida tauri, also Thy. 708.

58. See Iliad XXII. 401-403. Astyanax has indeed become futurus Hector (551) in death.

59. Fitch op. cit. 68 presents an interesting chiastic pattern for the presentation of the fates of Polyxena and Astyanax. See also Colakis op. cit. 150-151

60. P.J.Davis op.cit. 309

61. See Henry op. cit. 153-154 on the importance of verbs of standing, falling & lying.

62. In this way they are united as victims of the

cyclic Tantalid feud

63. Fitch op.cit. 107 compares her lack of responsibility to that of Ulysses, also see note 29 supra

64. The ghost of Achilles will be remembered in song. Cf. the traditional opening of epic poetry (Aeneid, Iliad).

65.see Ep. LXXI 12, LXX 4-6 Colakis op.cit.note 10

66. Lawall op.cit.248-249 suggests that this Choral Ode is the key to the play's structure.

67. Note this perversion within the Atreid feud

Thy. ...longum nefas

eat in nepotes... (28-29)

68. See 1010ff.

69. See M. Wilson op. cit. 28ff for analysis of structure.

70. See Lucretius op. cit. III, 917-997, also J.M.C. Toynbee Death & Burial in the Roman World (London, 1971) 33-39 for an overview of Roman beliefs concerning the afterlife.

A Discussion of the Cyclic Nature of Crime and the Notion of Heredity in *Thyestes*

In Thyestes the culmination of the heredity of evil together with the cyclic nature of crime is presented, and it cannot be surpassed in the other plays Agamemnon and Troades which concern the Tantalid dynasty. This is a tightly constructed play with a complex use of imagery and motifs, and there is also the demonstration of psychological interplay between the brothers Atreus and Thyestes.[1] It is in Thyestes that the powerfully negative qualities of this familial feud become augmented over a span of generations, until finally they become concentrated and refined. This brings the cycle of inherited crime and revenge full circle, with the major focus on the ancient Tantalid banquet motif and the breaking of the time-honoured guest/host tradition which links Tantalus with his direct descendants Thyestes and Atreus, together with the calculated misuse of power in the assumption of autocratic kingship. In Thyestes, as in Agamemnon and Troades there is demonstrated little justice. If the harmony of nature is to be equated with the Stoic ideal of wisdom in man, then when that harmony is disrupted and emotion conquers reason then chaos results[2], but reason can transcend this process[3], however not in this particular scenario.

Thyestes has been described accurately as

a drama of moral blackness[4], but in common with Agamemnon and Troades there are also involved the themes of revenge, deceit, furor, lack of wisdom, greed, and the breaking of fides. However, it is in Thyestes that these themes are set most effectively in the most dangerous milieu of all, that of delusion. The resulting chaos between the brothers is mirrored by total disruption in the world of nature, with a special relevance in to the major motif of the brutality of the hunt. This is a drama where the gods have no relevance and ultimately where pessimism triumphs.

Unlike the ghost of Thyestes in Agamemnon who emerged from the Underworld, Janus-like to reveal the past and the future, including the banquet motif and his incest with the prophecy of familial crime[5], his antecedent the ghost of Tantalus bears a slightly more brief but an infinitely more disturbing message. What is to come, despite his objections, shall make Tantalus, the source of evil, seem almost innocent by comparison

> ... iam nostra subit
> e stirpe turba quae suum vincat genus
> ac me innocentem faciat et inausa audeat
>
> (18-20)

It is through Tantalus, the first member of this family to kill and serve up his kin, in the form of

Punctuation!

his son Pelops, that the precedent has been set for future generations (242)[6]. His progeny will ensure the constant occupation of Minos as judge (22-23)[7], as if, in mockery, Tantalus' voracious appetite will be secured in the expansion of evil by the even greater insatiability of his descendants.

The prologue is a dialogue between the Ghost and the Fury, with Tantalus proving impotent in his attempted resistance to the Fury who urges on the evil course of events. The ghost of Tantalus dreads further punishment to that which he suffers in the Underworld (12 ff.), and he is driven by the Fury who predicts the awful future for Pelopid descendants. He is an unwilling messenger (86ff.), and she is required to foretell the future cycle of crime, violence and revenge, which will exceed all that has gone before and to urge rivalry in guilt (24) which is inextricably linked with the hunger for power

> dubia violentae domus
> fortuna reges inter incertos labet:
> miser ex potente fiat, ex misero potens
>
> (33-35)

This has particular reference to Atreus and Thyestes in the context of fraternal crime (40) and she orders the denial of what is right (fas,47),

together with the negation of the traditional virtues of fides and brotherly love. The sinister banquet is to be repeated but with refinement, epulae instruantur (62) in the name of the originator, Tantalus, who now as an object of pity makes a futile plea to the Fury against his destiny (86-95). His attitude which has some similarity in its helplessness as that of Thyestes, later in the simile of the ship (438f.), introduces a moment of dramatic tension, but it cannot be sustained. Both appeal to Jove (90 f., 1077f.), and the lack of any response confirms the emptiness of the heavens. Both are overcome, and Tantalus again is conquered by his punishment from the gods, insatiable hunger and thirst, and he burns incensum (98), perustis flamma (99), unable to exercise any free will. Thus the atavistic voracity of a physical appetite is transferred to his line in the denial of will, and this is expressed then in the form of a pathological craving for evil by his descendant Atreus.

Tantalus is forced to flee back to the Underworld and he leaves the earth in a state of utter confusion (117-119) with the threat of the sun's retreat en ipse Titan dubitat an iubeat sequi (120). There may be here an analogy between the reluctance of the natural world to accept the presence of the Ghost of Tantalus, and the

reluctance of Tantalus to accept his destiny as described by the Fury (83-86). Yet it becomes obvious that it is Atreus rather than Tantalus who is the cause of the sun actually leaving the world (637 f.), which foreshadows (783-804) the occurrence anticipated by the Fury

nox alta fiat, excidat caelo dies (51)

However, at first the Ghost, which may have seemed to be an impotent faded memory of the initial banquet, is stimulated as the Fury goads[10] him, misce penates (52). She plays on his emptiness suggesting that he should fill up (imple 53) his descendants with the crimes of familial feud and satisfy his hunger (ieiunia exple 65), although he has originally stated in this context complebo (22). It is this polarity of satiety and emptiness which mirrors the physical and the emotional extremes between Tantalus and Atreus. Atreus indicates that there can be no restrictions on his actions (217-218) which will end as the Fury has predicted as Libido victrix (46), bene est, abunde est, sat est etiam mihi (889). Indeed, the ghost of Tantalus is libido personified, as is Atreus[11].

However, Atreus is filled with lust for vengeance, while the Ghost lusts for food and drink. Both are destined to remain unsatisfied (171-175, 1056) but it is Atreus who will provide

the impetus for future retribution by leaving his brother alive, whilst Tantalus has become disgusted (66f.). Nevertheless, despite his warning for his descendants

> ne sacra manus
> violate caede neve furiale malo
> aspergite aras[12] (93-95)

Tantalus has no option but to obey the Fury and he completes his mission before returning to the Underworld.

However, this Fury is particularly interested in the revenge between brothers *fratrem expavescat frater ... fratris et fas et fides/ iusque omne pereat* (40 ff.), and the audience is prepared for the megalomania of Atreus as an instrument of *ira* (166ff.). Atreus wishes his crime to be *nefas / atrox, cruentum* (193-194) with the desire to surpass previous vengeance (195-196). From the outset he is a victim of the passion for revenge.[13] Just as the Fury urges Tantalus *age* (24) following *perge* (23) which perhaps implies some hesitation by the ghost, so Atreus in this formal language of ritual urges on his own frenzy (192) and repeats this imperative in the climax of his crime against his brother (284).[14]

Inordinate greed (46) for revenge in the context of *ira* and *furor* dominates the past, present and the future of this family[15] in accord

with the constant motifs of aeterna fames... aeterna sitis (149-150) of the progenitor Tantalus. The Chorus nobiles Argi (119) cares for its city's condition, and points up the desolate state of this world where there is never any weariness in the search for vengeance, and even the heavens are as empty as Tantalus of any caring god (122). However, the Chorus may seem to be overly optimistic, or even deluded as they plead to let a god return

> advertat placidum numen et arceat
> alternae scelerum ne videant vices
> nec succedat avo deterior nepos
> et maior placeat culpa minoribus (132-135)

especially as they would appear to have no knowledge of the events which have occurred immediately prior to their entrance. This energy for revenge stands in direct contrast to Tantalus himself who is weary (lassus 152) and doomed to eternal emptiness and who is mocked by the punishment of the natural world which recoils to deny him sustenance. Just as the emptiness of Tantalus is emphasised vacuo gutture (152), so is emphasised the potential for violence of Atreus. However, while Atreus swells (tumidos 609, tumet 737), he remains like Tantalus ultimately unsatisfied (1053ff), as he complains cecidit in cassum dolor (1066).

As in Agamemnon and Troades the culpability for evil remains the domain of the humans and not the gods as they, impotent and appalled (264f.,1021) have deserted the world. Despite the Fury's insistence that the ghost of Tantalus must incite his kin to madness (24), it seems that they are quite capable of determining the ongoing cycle of evil without any encouragement. The final triumph of Atreus indeed negates the possibility of divine intervention by ensuring that the reality of Thyestes' punishment (1112) will remain as an incentive for future revenge (42,46-47). In this world which is dominated by Atreus' evil, it is made clear that here the gods also are afraid

fiat hoc,fiat nefas
quod, di, timetis (265-266)

Atreus, confident in his self-avowed potential for crime, disgusts the gods (703-704), but he outclasses them o me caelitum excelsissimum (911) after he dismisses them dimitto superos (888) as being superfluous in the world where he considers himself to be supreme. With bitter despair Thyestes eventually comes to realise that Atreus has succeeded, and that the gods have fled (fugere superi 1021) so that there can be no place in this desolate world for any gods, or for their divine assistance.

It is Atreus who reinforces the delusion

which blinds this family to future consequence when he claims the true palm of victory (1097),[16] as previously, delusion is obvious (410) when Thyestes ominously recalls his own past triumphs in the context of the false security of victory in the dubious safety of the Pelopid home, and his courage falters (419 f.,424ff., 444ff.).

Thyestes is blind to his brother's intention, despite his doubts and his hesitation (427f.) and Atreus himself is deluded in his misuse of power, whether it is the pursuit of revenge or for personal aggrandisement, both of which deny wisdom in the Stoic sense[17]. His request for war (180ff.) which proclaims his potential for violence, and the use of the military language together with flammis (182) emphasises his lack of moderation and his determination to achieve further destruction. Atreus has become a hideous parody of the wise king[18] with a mind closed to any logic, and he sees himself as ruler to be the tutor in crime to the next generation

ut nemo doceat fraudis et sceleris vias,
regnum docebit (312-313)

Again the word fraudis is used to emphasise the deceit which exists within this family[19]. Atreus sees himself above and beyond any control and he sees himself from the outset as beyond sanctitas

pietas fides (217), perverted in his emotion towards Thyestes. Whilst the attendant serves as a foil to his master and is quick to point out the difference between the enlightened monarch, the Stoic sapiens, and the tyrant, throughout the dialogue the term for ruler is used somewhat loosely. Nevertheless, the attendant tries to encourage Atreus towards benign kingship, and to gain stability in ruling (215ff.) However, Atreus places himself in the category of rex which in his mind is to mean tyrant, with the practice of the role of his autocratic power proving the tutor as a basis for his life of treachery and crime (312 f.), and so he is filled with the false security of power (214 ff.) to do as he pleases (218). He is deluded, and does not realise that he is fulfilling the Fury's prophecy of reges... incertos (34) in what is to be an unending cycle of revenge and the search for power. Atreus is obsessed with vengeance

> ignave, iners, enervis et (quod maximum
> probrum tyranno rebus in summis reor)
> inulte (176-178)

and he sees no place for virtue as a tyrant

> sanctitas pietas fides
> privata bona sunt; qua iuvat, reges eant
> (217-218)

Thyestes, indeed is no longer tyrannus and in his enforced exile now appears to espouse the

values of modesty and lack of ambition *esse iam miserat iuvat* (427) which are the hallmarks of the Stoic *sapiens*

> immane regnum est posse sine regno pati
>
> (470)

However, he appears to lack any real conviction, and so it may be only a token statement. Atreus' description of him in his unkempt state (505-507), serves later to point up the philosophical degradation with Thyestes' assumption of the trappings of luxury (908ff.) The attributes of the wise man are expanded in detail by the Chorus (379-390), in orthodox Stoic terms and internalise the concept, and they note that true kingship exists in the mind which espouses genuine modesty and reason. It seems obvious that this Chorus is, like the first, ignorant of the true state of affairs, and indeed they may have been absent from the action of the play until this entry. They have no notion of the impending evil which Atreus has proclaimed to the attendant (321-330) immediately prior to their statement that

> Tandem regia nobilis
> antiquii genus Inachi
> fratrum composuit minas (336-338)

Unwittingly they anticipate the ominous trappings of the future dreadful banquet *vestis Tyrrhiae*

color (345, cf. Tyrrhio... vestes 955f.). It could be that their philosophising could seem to apply to Thyestes at this stage, and indeed it is true that he seems to lack any passion and seems devoid of ambition, so that he might be considered as perhaps having suffered in exile with a subsequent numbing of his spirit by sorrow[20].

Passion (ira) has been part of the motivation for all crime in this family as the Fury has decreed ne sit irarum modus (26), also nihil sit ira quod vetitum putet (39)[21]. Passion is attributed to both brothers by Atreus (509-510). Thyestes has been persuaded by his sons, under his brother's influence, to return to his ancestral Pelopid home, although with much misgiving (423-428). Atreus had hated his time as an exile per regna trepidus exul erravi mea (237) and so it seems obvious that he thinks Thyestes will have felt the same about his period away from the throne. Therefore he considers that Thyestes will be glad to exchange his status as an exile for restoration to a dual kingship. However, Thyestes does give an impression of weakness and of guilt (512-514), and when he complies, saying sequor (489), he echoes directly his ancestor the ghost of Tantalus (100). Moreover, they do share the similarities of initial reluctance for vengeance, in that their ideals are subject to reversals, and

it becomes obvious through various parallels that all members of this family are closely related. Pelops is related to Thyestes in his reference to the chariot-racing (407-410), and Tantalus as a forerunner in child murder for the banquet of the gods (146) to Atreus (691ff.), with the victims slain at the hearth or altar (focus 61, 768, 1058)[22]. While the relationship seems linguistically closer with Atreus, Thyestes shares Tantalus' reluctance to proceed with vengeance, and he does not initially seem interested in the mantle of royal privilege and power. However, although Thyestes' Stoic credo (446ff.) initially may have given a basis for some optimism that he will be able to maintain his philosophy of moderation, it is not sustained. Indeed, it serves to underline those items which will play, ultimately, a part in his downfall.

In fine irony, he is seduced from his former principles (542). Thyestes' acceptance of the crown proffered by Atreus (554ff.) proves a hollow celebration, with Atreus' victims destined for the celebration to be Thyestes' own sons. Physical and mental degradation accelerate apace for Thyestes as Atreus' evil objectives are achieved. Food which was to be taken in moderation (457), will be taken greedily (890), drink will become poison as the wine is changed to blood

(914f.) and the Fury's prediction will be fulfilled (65). Uncomprehending (ignarus), Thyestes states his reason for dreading his brother, that is, he fears him because of the threat to his sons' safety (485-486).

Delusion is a major feature of Thyestes, and it is introduced with the avowed intention of Atreus to deceive his brother. However, it is not just Thyestes who is the victim of delusion. Atreus also shares this condition of mental blindness together with a total lack of insight. Atreus is, though, also his own victim as he is intent on regarding Thyestes as having similar ambitions to his own and to being eager to claim the throne (288-289). To the attendant, Atreus catalogues all the wrongs that he supposes Thyestes to have done him

> coniugem stupro abstulit
> regnumque furto: specimen antiquum imperii
> fraude est adeptus, fraude turbavit domum
>
> (222-224)

In this list, Atreus has compressed his bitter grudges[23], but then he expands on old complaints including the theft of the golden fleece and the period of his life when he ad been an exile (trepidus exul 237). However, it would appear that the nucleus of his grievance concerns the fidelity

of his wife. She is criticised sharply as corrupta coniunx (239) and Atreus' major doubt is expressed: whether or not his paternity is legitimate.[24] He uses this as an excuse to involve the boys in the seduction of Thyestes (296f., 310ff.) The attendant performs the necessary role for Atreus' disposition of the plot in this well-paced altercatio (200-219,245-266), and the attendant is responsible for the typically Stoic rejoinders in this verbal counterpoint.

These sententiae serve to emphasise Atreus' lack of reason, his denial of virtue and moderation where filial piety must be destroyed ardet furore pectus[25] (253) in an atmosphere of revenge, and it is joined in association with the Furies' torches (250 ff.) Atreus concludes that his crime will be so great that death will be a benefit[26] where he rules, and he seeks satisfaction in more hideous vengeance,[27] than that which has ever occurred before (270ff.) and that Thyestes will devour his own children. It is in the imagery of disordered nature that Atreus' mental upheaval (260ff.) is described. Moral disarray is followed immediately by the unnatural disturbance of the sky and the earth, when from the depths, thunder echoes yet the sky is clear.[28]

There follows the physical shattering of the family hearth and home, described as if it has

occurred already (crepuit 264), so rapid will be the result of the planned evil, and it includes the household gods who trembling vertere vultum (265). It also looks forward to the vivid and expanded picture of the actual palace grove (668ff.). In the context of previous ill-intentioned banquets,[29] Atreus states his plan fully for the first time

liberos avidus pater
gaudensque laceret et suos artus edat
(277-288)

and Seneca's earlier emphasis on hunger and satiety takes on a broader meaning. Indeed, the use of aspice (416) puts the focus back to that earlier feast (21), and to Atreus himself as he sets in train the continuation of this hereditary cycle of crime (242). It also anticipates the first view Atreus has of his prey (505ff.), with Thyestes described as a wild beast (fera 491) to be hunted (cf. 286f.) and it illustrates the moral blindness of Thyestes as he neglects to regard his own advice and intuition (414-416). This is a bitter comment on the frailty of the human mind[30].

The Chorus earlier has asked the gods, in an inversion of a Horatian dictum[31]

alternae scelerum ne redeant vices
nec succedat avo deterior nepos (133-134)

The closeness by position of avo ... nepos has been

seen earlier, juxtaposed at 89-90 (avus nepotes). Thus the direct involvement and link between the generations is stressed. The name of Tantalus for a son of Thyestes is apt: this is indeed a closely-knit family. Moreover, this is a world of unnatural portents, where ivory statues weep (702)[32] as Atreus commences to kill Thyestes' sons[33] for the cannibalistic feast, and he complies implebo patrem (890), in accordance with the command of the Fury imple ... totam domum (53).

The apparent dichotomy in the philosophical ideals of the two brothers presents an opportunity to exploit the psychological tensions between them. Thyestes can see his position with Atreus is reflected in that of his two sons non capit regnum duos[34] (444), yet he is deflected from his initial intentions with comparative ease, after the young Tantalus ominously puts his trust in a god (489). Thyestes is an exemplar of moral decline. He has claimed to live modestly (455ff.) and to be fully aware of the dangers of the trappings of ostentation. Yet he returns in his squalid state (505-507) to the family home, which is described by the messenger (641ff.) in unambiguous language, and it forms a complete contrast to Thyestes' lowly appearance.[35] This home is gilded (auratas 646, cf. nitor / fulgore 414f.) and it threatens the ordinary people (643). The language is that of

excess and it is suggestive of tyranny which fits the description by the Fury of the lofty pillar and the torchlight (54ff.). Thyestes has stated that he possesses the virtues of the Stoic wise king[36], especially in regard to a moderate lifestyle and appetite where

nec somno dies
Bacchoque nox iungenda pervigili datur
(466-467)

but at Atreus' table he becomes a glutton (eructat 911), eating and drinking to excess. Thyestes has discarded his rags after a brief demurral (530ff.), and he has assumed the trappings of luxury in the robes of kingship offered by Atreus (524ff.,543-545)[37]. The external picture of over-indulgence (947ff.) mirrors that of of Thyestes' greedy consumption at the banquet (911, cf.ieunia exple 65) as the irony of his handing his sons to the care of Atreus

obsides fidei accipe
hos innocentes, frater (520-521)

will rebound in tragic consequence.

Thyestes has demonstrated the transience of his espousal of low estate as he denies the benefits of exile

Pectora longis hebetata malis,
iam sollicitas ponite curas...

fugiat trepidi comes exilii tristis egestas
rebusque gravis pudor afflictis (920-925)

which had formerly been so attractive (425-426). It is with the dénouement of this festum diem (970)[38] when the wine, commingled with blood, (cf.65f.)[39] a hallmark of the Pelopid banquet, has been drunk. Thyestes' perception has become blunted by indulgence, even though his food often sticks in his throat (781-782), probably through his voracity. The cunning of his brother plays no small part in lessening Thyestes' sensitivity.

magnum ingenti strage malorum
pressum fracti pondera regni
non inflexa cervice pati,
nec degenerem victumque malis
rectum impositas ferre ruinas (929-933)

Thyestes' original notion of Stoic kingship has been reduced to to the deluded ravings of a drunken victim. All Atreus' innuendo has been unmarked and unheeded with Thyestes acceptance fraternis dapis / donum (983-985), together with the involvement of the family gods (984f.). After Atreus' revelation of the nature of the meal (1034), Thyestes finds the crime too great for any coherence of thought or action.[40] In a neatly balanced phrase

genitor en natos premo
premorque natis (1050-1051)

the answer to his question as to any limit to crime is left to Atreus who remains unsatisfied and asks hoc quoque exiguum (1053).

Just as Thyestes' physical unease is a reflection of his mental turmoil, so it applies in reverse. Thyestes' indigestion is similar to the mental storm within Atreus, and what has been instigated by the Ghost of Tantalus at the start of this crime has been perpetrated upon Thyestes. Both brothers are, in the absence of any control, filled with Tantalus[41]. Thyestes' distress and his drunken carousal illustrate just how far he has moved from the safety of moderation to reap the perverted reward of his gluttony. More importantly, the physical description of his distended stomach (1006f.) recalls vividly the action of greedy Charybdis (581), as Thyestes' senses revolt after his meal

mens, ante sui praesaga mali (958)

Atreus however, is philosophically and psychologically unambiguous. He is egocentric and completely irrational. He remains single-minded and he never exhibits any indecision regarding the steps he takes in his intent to exact the utmost revenge and in his purpose to commit

scelere praecipuum nefas (285)

He demonstrates only brief hypocrisy in his

pretence of his brotherly regard (509-511,521ff.) towards Thyestes and this is in keeping with his purpose. Atreus changes little, suffering no remorse for the cruelty he performs, just the regret that he has missed an opportunity for more refinement in his bestiality (1053ff.). In his customary excess he has been too hasty in his method of revenge, and he remains unsatisfied, like Tantalus (1056 cf.171ff.) destined to be forever hungry. Atreus is the antithesis of the Stoic wise king[42] in his striving for absolute power, and he will never be capable of attaining a state of wisdom. He cannot be deflected from his unwavering belief in his brother's enmity (917-918).

Thyestes' reaction to Atreus' deliberately delayed revelation of the fate of his sons conveys more fully the difference in the psychological make-up between the brothers. Thyestes has been deceived completely by his brother's earlier promise of friendship

credula praesta pectora fratri (962)

and he exposes his gullibility when he believes that, from brotherly feeling, Atreus will allow him his sons for burial (1025ff.). Earlier, Thyestes has felt mental turmoil (958ff.) in the apt imagery of a storm at sea, but he dismisses blindly the notion of Atreus' treachery, preferring to think that it due to the joy of being with his brother

credula praesta pectora fratri:... nolo infelix,... subitos fundunt/ oculi fletus, nec causa subest (963ff.) Indeed, Thyestes unwittingly has claimed

augere cumulus hic voluptatem potest
si cum meis gaudere felici datur (974-975)

Atreus enjoying his triumph over his brother continues to toy with Thyestes, teasing him with the riddle Quidquid e natis tuis/ superest habes, quodcumque non superest habes (1030-1031). This has the double meaning that Thyestes cannot see what he has consumed, but can only see what remains visible on the dish which is literally all that does remain. Finally Atreus shocks Thyestes with the full revelation of the content of the feast which earlier had caused Thyestes so much internal discomfort[43]

Epulatus ipse es impia natos dape (1034)

Each brother appears to be the opposite of that which the other believes him to be. Thyestes has trusted Atreus as his host, and still continues to trust him sufficiently to become a supplicant (517f.). He has presented a complete shift of ground in his mental attitude and consequently he has been completely exploited by his brother. Thyestes allows his greed and ambition to corrupt his former transient wisdom. However, Atreus sees Thyestes as an equal in tyranny (302). Atreus is

manipulative, but whilst he deceives his brother also he deceives himself in his haste to exact retribution. His revenge proves to him to be insufficient for satisfaction hoc quoque exigium est mihi (1053), yet the crime cannot be repeated. However, Atreus confesses that he has proved the fidelity of his wife (1099) while Thyestes is left to wish that

> aeterna nox permaneat et tenebris tegat
> immensa longis scelera (1094-1095)

There remains a tension however, present in the qualified satisfaction of Atreus. He is though, given the final comment (1112) as he rejoiced in the ineluctable suffering of his brother.

So we see these two brothers bound together in the nexus of the psychology and philosophy which will ensure that the family cycle of crime will continue (alternae scelerum ... vices 133).[44] We have seen earlier that the gods have left, so Thyestes' plea that they will 'guard the innocent' (1102), and that Vindices aderunt dei (1110), sounds very hollow. In this play there is no role for the gods who are impotent in this family's company with their penchant for savage passion and revenge.

Earlier, Atreus introduced the first motif of the hunt (491) which had been anticipated briefly by the attendant (laqueos 286 f.). There is

the mention of the strong leash[45] (loro 498) needed to restrain the strong animal and its killing instincts, with Atreus to be seen as the predator in the simile of the savage hunting beast (707ff.,732ff.) who seeks not just his prey (praeda 501)[46]. This word also connotes possession and also the spoils of war. Thyestes is held fast in the snare (plagis 500), as literally he is trapped mentally from when he decides to return to his home, and also when the simile is reworked to to the psychological level

cum sperat ira sanguinem, nescit tegi (504)

However, Atreus succeeds in suppressing his intentions, and like the Umbrian hound he is kept in check, as he welcomes his brother in honeyed words of the most gross hypocrisy. It seems as though the time lapse which occurs before Atreus seeks revenge is a gestation period which effectively fuels this desire. This aids the dramatic pace set by Seneca who now expands this simile of the chase, and Atreus is compared in bestiality to the Indian tigress (707ff.) seeking her prey, and to a raving Armenian lion after the kill (732ff.) yet he remains unsatisfied. From the outset, the crimes of the House of Pelops are not to be perpetrated in half measure (918ff.). Atreus hesitates[47] (dubitat 714) like the hungry and

savage tigress (710f.) who deliberately keeps her hunger waiting in order to increase the enjoyment of the kill. Yet so the corpse of Tantalus also hesitates (dubitasset 724) as if in hideous mockery of his uncle before he falls on him (725). This unnatural movement also echoes that in the place of execution, the Pelopid grove (626ff.).

However, Atreus now performs the sacrificial ritual with meticulous attention to minute detail[48]

attendit ipse: nulla pars sacri perit (695)

He is sacerdos (690) and sees himself equal to a god[49] (cf. 713,885,911), with his victims being not just Thyestes' sons, but Thyestes himself. Significantly, Thyestes, rather than his sons, has been described earlier by Atreus as a potentially sacrificial beast

tuta seposita sacer
in parte carpit prata (231-232)

Yet this priest kills the boys earlier, not from regard to the gods, but in search of the ultimate cruelty to his brother. In this way the sacrifice has become a grotesque parody, despite the faultless performance of the ritual where the victims are sprinkled beforehand with culter mola (688) and they are dragged before the bedecked altars ornantur arae (684). However, the sacrificial animals are human, and the

responsibilities towards kin sanguis ac pietas die/ colantur (510-511) have become perverted.

Atreus kills savagely (722f.,727f.,739ff.), and in priestly ritual he even attempts augury by his examination of the entrails (757F.) after brutally removing them

> erepta vivis exta pectoribus tremunt
> spirantque venae corque adhuc pavidum salit;
> at ille fibras tractat ac fata inspicit
> et adhuc calentes viscerum venas notat
>
> (755-758)

but the results of his augury are not disclosed. He then proceeds to butcher and to cook his sacrificial meats. The fire, the hearth which shudders trepidantes focos (767) and the bodies all react against Atreus' sacrifice. Even the smoke, in an inversion of nature is heavy (gravis 773), and it is prevented from rising, choosing to settle on penates nube deformi (775). It seems as if the spirits of the butchered children are attempting to remind the household gods by physical contact, of the need for further vengeance in re~~ve~~payment for their repayment stolen lives. So the command from the Fury misce penates (52) has been fulfilled by Tantalus' descendant.

The imagery of heaviness and that of darkness are important in this play, and examples

punctuate the action at significant moments. We have seen the heavy smoke when the children were cooking (773), but there is also the unrelieved night of the cosmic collapse with graves...umbras (826). The sun after Thyestes has consumed his sons insists on nox gravis (787), as it withdraws in horror at the crime, just as the heavens are heavy (990) in the deserted dark sky. Indeed, following the banquet Thyestes states

> vix lucet ignis: ipse quin aether gravis
> inter diem noctemque desertus stupet.
> quid hoc? magis magisque concussi labant
> convexa caeli, spissior densis coit
> caligo tenebris noxque se in noctem abdidit
> fugit omne sidus (990-995)

in a graphic description of total cosmic disorder. Nature has reacted by producing chaos and the diurnal rhythm is upset (107-121). Atreus has been warned

> imo mugit e fundo solum
> tonat dies serenus (262-263)

but he is spurred on in his passion to achieve his revenge. Thyestes finally confirms the heavy darkness as he calls impotently on the gods in the deserted heaven for aid that will never come (1077), and there can be no reply in this state of cosmic collapse. Perhaps there may have been some slight optimism for the future as Thyestes'

response as the wronged brother is not to seek personal revenge immediately, but it is primarily for his own destruction trisulco flammeam telo facem/ per pectus hoc transmitte... ego sum cremandus (1089-1092). This is an impossibility as he pleads to the empty heavens that he and Atreus should be standing with Tantalus (1011). Thyestes in his grief would seem to have regained some integrity, but during his period of moral turpitude he is shown to be as degraded as Atreus in his triumph of evil. Moreover, the future of this family has been predestined (101ff.)

The imagery of darkness has been expanded previously in the description of the ancient grove where stands the Tantalid palace, and where the sacrifice is performed. The trees are those traditionally associated with death and funerals, taxus et cupressus et nigra ilice / obscurat nutat silva (654), and only the tree sacred to Jove (quercus 656) overlooks them. Even the stream trickling through is black and sluggish, and the clanking chains are reminiscent of Tartarus[50], with the repetition of u in lucus excussis.../ ululantque underlining the mournful picture with these sounds.

Also the use and suggestion of the figure three[51] with its connotations of sinister magic

occurs three times in this play. It is in the Pelopid grove that a hound, reminiscent of Cerberus with his three heads bays (676), and the fire leaps three times (767ff.) before it burns unwillingly on the hearth. The crown on Atreus' head is less than secure when it slips from his head (702) in an ominous portent before he slays his nephews.

The Chorus has a greater relevance than in Agamemnon and it is closely integrated with the plot in Thyestes[52], despite the discussion as to whether or not it is actually on stage in the scenes immediately prior to its appearance[53]. It initially is quick to ask for the protection of the gods, if there are any which will befriend this country with its dreadful history (122ff.). However, some anxiety on the part of the Chorus is evident in the suggestion of hesitation as to whether or not any god will listen to their plea si quis...si quis... si quis (122-124). They express the fervent but impotent hope that the gods will be able to prevent further vengeance in this family with its recurrent cycle of crime

> alternae scelerum ne redeant vices
> nec succedat avo deterior nepos (133-134)[54]

The plea is in direct opposition to and follows the Fury's express purpose (101ff.), peccatum satis est (138) and the Chorus then expresses its optimistic hopes, or indeed its delusion, especially in its

final plea (132-137) in the mildness of nature for the descendants of Tantalus that his weariness (lassa 136, lassus 152) be transferred to the Tantalids, and unlike their ancestor who remains thirsty, that the descendants' thirst be satisfied (135ff.)

The thematic importance of this first Choral ode (122-175), relates to the crime and punishment of Tantalus (122ff.), and some Pelopid background, namely the bribery by Pelops of Myrtilus. This involves the sabotage of a chariot so that Pelops wins an important race, and this wrecked chariot, evidence of the evil which besets this family, is preserved as a reminder of familial treachery and crime in the Pelopid palace (660). Also preserved as trophies are the symbols of luxury and decadence such as Pelops' embroidered robe and his Phrygian turban (662ff.)[55]. Thematically, the ode emphasises the hunger and the thirst of Tantalus in precise descriptive terms of his physical state, and stress is placed on the parts of his body which relate to his appetite (155,160f.,172).

The Chorus comments on the natural world with its geographic features, the isthmus of Corinth (124f. cf. 112ff.). Mount Taygetus (126) and the stream of Alpheus (130 cf. 116f.) before

the upsetting influence of the ghost of Tantalus. It comments especially on the tree and the stream, and gives to them the human attributes of both movement (tremens 156), and the power to threaten (incubat 155) by hanging over the tortured Tantalus. Nature seems guarded in the presence of the Ghost, and this suggests the anxiety that all nature feels when close to any member of the Tantalid line.[56] Indeed, Tantalus' mouth gapes patulis...hiatibus (157), suggesting a gasping which intensifies the image of insatiable hunger and thirst.

The symbolic temptation of the fruit-laden trees to Tantalus is reminiscent of Atreus' temptation of Thyestes when he successfully tempts him and lures him back to his family home. However, the Pelopid grove is more sinister than this one which teases Tantalus, and it has reacted against the evil sacrifice by moving in fear lucus tremescit (696). Finally for the Ghost, torment is to continue its cycle when he drinks deeply bibit altum (174f.) from what appears to be a whirling stream, and finds not water but dust, pulverem (175).

The second Choral ode (336-403) is reflective in nature, and in its mainly Stoic dicta it gives initial release from the nervous energy of the exchange between the attendant and Atreus. This

follows the disclosure, in the context of previous cannibalistic feasts, of the heinous crime which Atreus confesses he intends to commit (278ff.). The Chorus may be presumed to be in ignorance of Atreus' plot, although it compresses the family history in asking

Quis vos exagitat furor,
alternis dare sanguinem
et sceptrum scelere aggredi? (339-341)

without hoping or needing to know that the answer is the motivation of revenge and passion. It has pinpointed the true nature of this family's crime, and juxtaposed it with a description of the opposite, that is the nature of the wise ruler[57], in the Stoic sentiment of the sapiens who should be free from ambition, unlike Atreus and to possess an inner peace

hoc regnum sibi quisque dat (390)

However, the qualities of wise kingship are noted in a succession of the qualifying negative non (344, 345,346,347,350,356,360, 363). Wisdom is a state irreconcilable with the Tantalid family. Indeed, this description fits neither Atreus nor Thyestes, and we see how far their line is from ever achieving this ideal condition for harmony. The Chorus, in obvious ignorance of the true state of affairs concerning Atreus' motives does comment

on a treaty of friendship between the brothers

Tandem regia nobilis
antiqui genus Inachi
fratrum composuit minas (336-338)

and questions this belief concerning the Tantalid family, but then in Stoic terms it enlarges on the basis for wise kingship and the reason for lack of opportunism. The Chorus also states that true kingship is essentially a fragile possession

ima permutat levis hora summis (598)

Environment plays an essential part in the creation of habit, and the habit of fear is nurtured by pride and by life in high position (391f.). Notably the idea of libera mors with the notion of knowing how to accept death gladly is espoused as ideal

occurritque suo libens
fato nec queritur mori (367-368)[58]

Both Atreus and Thyestes exhibit the enjoyment of luxury, dissatisfaction with their status, and both seek revenge upon their kin: Atreus by his own hand, and Thyestes seeking it through the impotent gods

Vindices aderunt dei;
his puniendum vota te tradunt mea
(1110-1111)[59]

It has been noted earlier that Seneca has introduced Roman overtones into this ode (445-

467) with Thyestes describing his denial of typically Roman excesses, rather than keeping to the older traditions, and it takes on a contemporary relevance together with the geographical descriptions of the Roman provinces Libycis (356) which was Rome's major source of grain, and the Tagus (354) from where the gold for Rome was mined.

The third ode (546-622) differs from the first ode, and it seems to complicate the dichotomy of the ideas of the second choral ode. Again in philosophical mood, the Chorus misunderstands the true state of affairs between Atreus and his brother, and accepts the act of Atreus placing the crown on Thyestes' head Imposita capiti vincla venerando gere (544), without recognising Atreus' ominous comment ego destinatas victimas superis dabo (545). However, it must be admitted that they scarcely believe the immediately preceding event (546). This Chorus begins by proclaiming the overwhelming power of pietate vera (549), and amor verus (551), and in a reflective mood compares the apparent compact between Thyestes and Atreus with the lull of the storm (560f.),[60] with the implication of the cessation of the cycle of war to a conclusion of peace (559). However, the amount of space alloted to the storm is greater than that

given to the description of peace, and it may be that this is a forewarning of the disorder of nature that is to follow the climax of Atreus' plan. The use of military language in this ode looks back to that of Atreus (180ff.) with reference in particular to the fulsit... agitatus ensis (555) which reflects back to the shining swords (183f.) in his imagined war which he feels should embroil the whole world (181), and in particular the land of Argos (184).

Atreus' expression of madness occurs immediately prior to his decision to dare a crime nefas/ atrox cruentum (193f.) which he attributes in his fantasy to his brother Thyestes. The Chorus attributes this civil war (562) to Mars (Mavors 557) rather than the passion of Atreus, and it seems that they are unable to comprehend the driving furor which spurs him on. The Chorus also seems confused, as if they are beginning to doubt that any god does look after Argos, and perhaps the following vivid description of the violent storm is a subconscious anticipation of the cataclysm which is to occur after the unconvincing compact of friendship between Atreus and Thyestes. Moreover, the ode concludes ominously with the comment

61

rotat omen fatum (618)

with the implication that for Thyestes destiny cannot be altered, no matter how good the

intention. Indeed, it may also foreshadow the cosmic disorder which is to follow. One may draw the conclusion that the philosophical ideals that are espoused will be irrelevant to both Atreus and Thyestes.[62] The mention of Clotho earlier (617) reinforces the idea of the uncertainty of destiny (621-622), and the qualities of virtue begin to fall apart, with the Chorus now lacking the confidence that seemed apparent at the beginning of the ode.

This idea is followed through to some extent in the fourth Choral ode (789-884), where there is effective concern shown at the unnatural darkness together with a lack of confidence in nature with the Chorus asking Jove the reason for this. There is a problem here, as the Chorus has had a full explanation of Atreus' sacrifice of his double nephews from the messenger. It may be possible to surmise although there is no textual evidence, in Zwierlein's edition of the text of a divided Chorus.[63] It has been stated that Seneca paid little note of the accepted role of the Chorus, and I feel it is reasonable to claim that the Chorus could have been divided to give narrative and dramatic integrity at this point. However, with the gods having fled there can be no reply. In the previous ode, it is notable that

despite the overt description of the state of wisdom, there is a mood of foreboding present, where anxiety is somewhat suppressed but not excluded (metus 348, metuit 348). The emphasis seems to be placed on the dangers to be surpassed rather than on the happiness and security of the wise king.

Question follows significant question, indicating the panic of the Chorus, as this night has fallen suddenly, without the usual twilight, Vesper[64] (795). The Chorus asks if the Giants are at war with the gods, as had happened in legend[65], and indeed Atreus' banquet has been an evil of gigantic magnitude. It has produced a similar upheaval and collapse of the natural world similar to that in its formation as if again Thessalicum Thressa premitur / Pelion Ossa (812f.). Furthermore, Thyestes later calls upon Jove to hurl the same thunderbolts that he had used against the Giants[66] on himself (1082ff.). Seneca's use of language is skilful with the repetition of quo (789,791) creating a feeling of distress coupled with a desperate bid to know the truth. The imagery of the still energetic oxen and the unusually early meal for the ploughman enlarges the picture of confusion which has fallen on the idyllic pastoral world.

This darkness which causes the Chorus to

tremble (trepidant,trepidant 828) is not normal night, but is gravis...umbras (826) as if the end of the world has occurred (813) as the Chorus grapples with the terrifying problem. There follows a long description of the destruction of the cosmos and the arrival of chaos (813-874), in traditional terminology. It is obvious that natural justice, considered sacred by the Stoics[67] has been outraged and this is the result. The objectivity of this Chorus has disappeared and they begin to understand that their world as they know it is at an end

in nos aetas ultima venit? (878)

before they dismiss their fear and regain their courage in the rationalisation that if the world is to perish for them there is no object in staying alive (822ff.).

This final Choral ode has called for the acceptance of fate, with the Chorus having been told by the messenger of the sacrifice of Thyestes' sons, and the preparation for the banquet (700ff.) which is the direct cause of the cosmic collapse. In this way the Chorus achieves a full integration with the plot in this play, unlike the Chorus in Agamemnon which mainly stands outside the action of the play.

However, Atreus then discloses the details

of the Thyestean feast himself. Indeed, he mocks the disorder of nature as he considers himself to be the equal of the stars (885f.), and he then rejoices in the darkness as it has removed the need for shame

> ne quid obstaret pudor,
> dies recessit (891-892)

Atreus then urges himself on[68] while the heavens remain empty dum caelum vacat (892).

It has been quite clear from the beginning of this play that nothing less than the reversal of the bounty of nature with the upset of its diurnal rhythm, can be the result of the actions of both these Atreid brothers (236,267ff.). It is this world which reveals in its godless situation that evil is triumphant, and that all crime is possible. Indeed, earlier, nature has warned Atreus

> imo fugit e fundo solum,
> tonat dies serenus ac totis domus
> ut fracta tectis crepuit et moti lares
> vertere vultum (262-265)

and the messenger has indicated the magnitude of this, the worst crime in the cycle affecting this race (747).

The messenger is given a lengthy role in Thyestes and he effectively acts as a liaison between the Chorus and the action of the play[69]. He is given the task of describing to the Chorus the

dismemberment of Thyestes' sons, and sufficient prominence is given to Atreus' reading of the auspices

> o nullo scelus
> credibile in aevo quodque posteritas neget:
> erepta vivis exta pectoribus tremunt
> spirantque venae corque adhuc pavidum salit;
> at ille fibras tractat ac fata inspicit
> et adhuc calentes viscerum venas notat
>
> (753-758)

At first the messenger is incredulous[70] that such terrible things could occur in Greece,[71] and again there are given the suitable geographic references by Seneca (627ff.), but the messenger regains his composure and he starts by commenting on the scenario, with the Pelopid palace threatening the people who live in its shadow (641-645). He then describes vividly the gloomy grove where the murders are committed (641ff.).

> Arcana in imo regio secessu iacet,
> alta vetustum valle compescens nemus
> penetrale regni, nulla qua laetos solet
> praebere ramos arbor aut ferro coli
>
> (650-653)

However, he notes that even the grove reacts against this sacrifice (696ff.).

The Chorus reacts suitably to his news, and

the messenger seems to become personally involved with his report, and he eventually sounds more confident as his disbelief is replaced by belief. This may be explained in part by the receptive attitude of the Chorus. Atreus has been described as furens (682), and this looks back to the Fury's note of the essential ingredient of the House of Tantalus furorem (101), which fits this description. The ritual is discussed in great detail which presents an immediacy of the messenger's eye-witness account (saepe...saepe 675-676), and the horror which it provokes. The ritual is correct, even to the purple bands around the heads of the fettered sons, and it is this detail which puts this human sacrifice as a perversion of one with the normal animal sacrifice to the gods. However, this sacrifice is to no god, unless Atreus is to be taken literally (911), but more realistically it is performed from the passion[72] for revenge to spite Thyestes. Indeed Atreus brutally decapitates one son (727).[73] This sacrifice is the first transgression of the the trust inherent in the guest/host tradition, but worse is to come as Thyestes is served up his sons to eat following Atreus' butchery. This act is in the direct tradition of the example of Tantalus at the earlier banquet he prepared for the gods (61-63).

It is given to the messenger to stress what

should be obvious: that although Thyestes' sons remain technically unburied, they are are buried within him (753 cf. 999ff.). Yet as if the boys themselves protest at their fate

> saepe praeclusae cibum
> tenuere fauces[74] (781-782)

and the wine recoils from his lips (987 cf. labrisque...fugas 69) whilst he sits resplendent in his luxurious trappings (780f.). However, protests are to no avail as Thyestes has become as depraved as Atreus, his hair now dripping with oil (madidus 780, cf. 734,948). He is gorged on meat and wine (780ff.),[75] and he has allowed his earlier good intentions to have become corrupted by his brother's values. Now no hideous detail is left unrecounted and horror follows as Atreus' savagery is told to the Chorus. However, it is not Atreus alone who is savage. Thyestes shows bestial greed as he rends (lancinat 778) his sons' flesh which emphasises his depravity in contrast to his brother's careful preparation of the sacrificial meats

> divisum secat/... corpus[76] (760-761)

Finally, the messenger addresses Thyestes in rhetorical fashion, and he recognises that Thyestes' peace of mind will last only while he remains in ignorance of his behaviour together with

the concealment by the unnatural darkness . However, it will ultimately be ineffective in hiding the terrible deed. So the messenger has fulfilled his role to tell of the complete reversal of normality both by the brothers and by the disappearance of the sun in a suitably oppressive gloom.

Seneca has presented in this, his most complex of the three tragedies discussed, the quintessential evil of the Tantalids as demonstrated by Atreus and Thyestes. The atmosphere of this play is dark and brooding, and in a world where delusion and ambition are paramount, there can be no room for any gods. Mention has been made of Roman details in this drama, and these exist only in Thyestes and not in Agamemnon or Troades. This would seem to bring to this play a contemporary Senecan aspect, and this may reinforce the lack of optimism both for the future of the Tantalid family together with that of Rome.

NOTES

1. cf. the chapter on Agamemnon, and also the argument for some psychological progression in the chapter on Troades. This play differs from both of these in the representation of psychological regression and the lack of any optimism for the future of this family.

2. See De Clem. 1,18

3. See De Vita Beata V,1

4. See A.J. Boyle, Book 6 218.

5. cf.Ag. 26-27, 20-21, 11, 28 ff. See also Ag. 233. Thyestes' incest with his daughter produces Aegisthus as an instrument of revenge against Atreus' son Agamemnon.

6. See Ag. 158f.,897ff.,Tro.248f.

7. see also Ag. 24.

8. R.J.Tarrant Seneca's Thyestes ed. & comm. AJPh (1985) also makes this point p. 98

9. see also the chapter on Agamemnon note 26

10. The Furies in this play are the instruments of revenge, and the reference of snake-like whips is described tortos ...angues(96-97), also Ag. anguinea ... verbera (760).

11. libido cannot exist in the ideal world of the Stoic wise man. See Ep. LXXI, 19, also see Tro. 285

and the connection with ira.

12. aspergo has the connotation of defilement besides the usual meaning of staining, cf. Tro. 1107

13. cf. Tro. 1000 age where Hecuba urges Pyrrhus to commit violence, this time followed by perge (1002) which has a similar implication of hesitation.

14. see 192,284.

15. Tantalus with Pelops, Atreus and Thyestes, Agamemnon with Iphigenia, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.

16. Cf. Ag. 938 where the gift of the victory palm to Orestes from Jove has sinister implications. For a different interpretation of Thy. 1097 see Boyle op. cit. 218. 17. See Choral ode 388-389 ff. also Ep.XC, 27.

18. Cf.Thy.449 with Ag.60 ff.

19. fraus and its derivatives are used in Thy. at 224 x 2,312,316,483,in Tro. at 482,613,750,867, and in Ag. at 207,298,633.

20. This statement is not to be read as the acceptance of the extreme view of Olof Gigon 'Bemerkungen zu Senecas Thyestes' Philologus 93 (1938-1939) 176-183

21. ira is used most in Thy. 26,39,180,259,431,504,509,519,552,713,735,737,808,1056. cf. Ag. 142,261,598, also Tro. 22,194,280,672,730,

See also my note 15 in the chapter on Ag. for the connection of passion with darkness.

22. See P.J. Davis, ' The Chorus in Seneca's Thyestes' CQ 39 (1989) 425

23. See Tarrant op. cit. p.122 for his comment on the chiastic phrasing of this passage.

24. cf. 327-330, also 1098-1102

25. ardeo carries the connotation of the destructive force of flame, see Tro. 280, cf.Thy. 98-99, also Vergil,A. IV, 101 for the combination of flame and passion.

26. cf. Ag. 995-996

27. For Clytemnestra's similar intentions see Ag. 193 ff.

28. See 262 ff. also cf. Tro.170 ff. for the unnatural behaviour of the earth at the appearance of the ghost of Achilles, especially tonuit.

29. See 145ff,272ff.

30. see Ep. CIX, 14

31. Horace Odes III,6. 46-48

aetas parentum peior avis tulit
nos nequiores, mox daturos
progeniem vitiosiorem

32. See Vergil G. I 480 f.

33. See E. Lefevre,'Die Kinder des Thyestes' Symbolae Osloenses 48 (1973) 97-108. I find his argument for three children (based mainly on tribus 1023) unconvincing when compared with other textual

evidence. See 682-683,703 -743, 778ff.,1005.

34. cf. Ag. 259 for a similar notion.

35. Gold and things that gleam, traditionally connote destruction. Thyestes earlier stated

clarus hic regni nitor
fulgore non est quod oculos falso auferat.(414-415).

See also poison from a golden cup (453), and Thyestes drinks the blood of his sons from a silver cup (913). Cf.Ag. 878 for the golden cups at the banquet.

36. cf.De tran. an. II,9.,IX,2., also Ep.CXIII,31 for examples of moderation and self-control.

37. For the seemingly customary exchange of clothes before disaster see Tro 946ff., Ag.881ff.

38. cf. Ag. 791,875. The motif of eating, drinking and celebration is never far from this family, and with disastrous effect.

39. Blood and wine are mixed in banquets of this kind, see Ag. 885ff.

40. This is echoed in construction at 1067-1068 by Atreus. See also a similar example Tro.690-691

41. See Boyle op. cit. p.210ff. for extensive discussion on satiety and emptiness.

42. De tran. an. 10,1. New line

43. The internal queasiness mirrors the mental upset that Thyestes is to suffer later.

44. cf. Ag. 77 scelus alternum

45. cf. Ag. 207. See also Vergil A. XII 753 f. for the Umbrian hunting dog.

46. See 663f., also my note 25 in the chapter on Troades. cf. Ag. 422 regarding the Greek victory at Troy.

47. cf. Ag. 140 for the hesitation of nature.

48. ferro admovet (690) is a technical term concerning sacrifice, and is echoed at 694. See also Tro. 693,947 admoveo.

49. This supports the idea of the Romanisation of of this play by Seneca. See Tarrant op.cit. p.147 regarding Quiritibus 396, which occurs only once in Seneca's Tragedies. See Tarrant op. cit. 193 on the use of mactet with a dative regularly used for naming a god.

50. cf. Vergil A. VI 557f.

51. Amongst Ag., Tro. and Thy., it is in Thy. alone that this emphasis is placed on tres. Also cf. Vergil A. IV 510f. for the repeated use of ter with its related chthonic atmosphere.

52. This is unlike the Chorus in Ag. and more so than in Tro.

53. See P.J Davis, op. cit. 422-424

54. cf. Thy. 90, also Ag. 35-36

55. Decadence is implied by this ostentation. cf. Vergil A. IV,136 ff., Aeneas was from Troy.

56. Tarrant op.cit. deals with the significance of this aspect and the whole ode at length p.113.

57. See Ep. CVIII, 13, also Ag. 610. See also P.J.Davis, op. cit. 421-435 for a scholarly treatment of Seneca's Chorus.

58. The development of this philosophical aspect has been discussed in the chapter on Troades.

59. See note 41 supra. Tarrant op.cit p.137 expands this idea.

60. cf. Vergil E. I,6 for the idea of otium as opposed to strife.

61. Cf. Ag. 72,Fortuna rotat

62. cf. Catullus 64 310ff.,also Vergil E. VI,46-47. See P.J.Davis op.cit. 426 where he suggests that the second and third odes establish a philosophical standard by which Atreus and Thyestes can be judged.

63. See J.D.Bishop 'Seneca, Thyestes 920-969: an Antiphony' Latomus 47 (1988) 409, also note 18

64. See Vergil G. 1,251

65. Cf. Ag. 345-346. In Thy. the Chorus has a thematic integration and relevance which is missing from Ag.. This greater coherence suggests that it was written later than Ag.

66. cf. Ovid Met. 1,154 f.

67. see nefas nocere vel malo fratri puta (219). Retaliation for an act of injustice is forbidden by the Stoics.

68. perge (892),also 23,490. cf Tro. 630,898,1002.

69. See Tro. 1056ff. for a similar function of the messenger, whereas in Ag. 867, this role is assigned to Cassandra.

70. Cf. Tro. 1056 ff. where his horror is less sophisticated and uncomplicated, although more dramatic. He states bluntly

mactata virgo est, missus e muris puer (1063)

Cf. Thy. 713, Tro. 196,248,361,943, for macto with the specific relation to sacrifice.

71. Cf.Tro. 1104 f. for similar incredulity in a civilised world.

72. See Tarrant op.cit p 193, note 712f. for his comment.

73. Cf.Ag. 901ff.

74. This word occurs only in Thy. 2,149,1107 and not in Ag. or Tro..

75. Thyestes' earlier good intentions and lack of ambition for fine things are denied (412ff.) He should have heeded his own advice and looked at the giver (dantem aspice 416).

76. This looks back to Tantalus who carved (divisus 147) his son Pelops for the original banquet for the gods. See also Tantalum et Pelopem - aspice / ad haec manus exempla poscuntur meae (242-243)

Conclusion

In my study of the three plays Agamemnon, Troades and Thyestes, there have emerged several constants. These include the importance of the role of heredity in the cycle of crime which involves the major characters and the members of the House of Tantalus, from the progenitor through to his descendants together with the total lack of remorse by the latter.

These descendants exist mainly to exact vengeance, and are incited by passion (ira) and madness (furor), and they act from free will in a world where fortune is fickle, where each character brings about his own downfall, and where the gods have little or no relevance. This is a theme which becomes increasingly significant in the order in which I discuss these plays, in accordance with the dating method of J.G. Fitch. I feel that there is other evidence which corroborates his theory on thematic and dramatic grounds, and these have been dealt with in the main body of the text.

Briefly, we see in each drama the rise of personal power and the absence of moderation with the disorder of nature in direct proportion to this, and ending finally in cosmic collapse with the sun hiding its light from the world. It would appear

that in these three plays, although the geographical location is relevant to each drama, that the influence of the actions of the characters assumes cosmic importance. The sympathetic turmoil of nature is an immediate response to the excesses in crime which have been committed, and which rule out any state of natural harmony.

There is also the development of dramatic tensions, the rise in the complexity and tightness of construction, the increase in the relevance of the Chorus, and the interweaving of the philosophy and psychology, which I feel culminates in Thyestes. In Thyestes there is reference to the contemporary Senecan world, and this cannot be accidental.

These plays can be considered primarily as Stoic, although there is some philosophical divergence in Troades. However, the emphasis on libera mors should not be underestimated. The plays show that plot and character are essential, and that the progression of each tragedy is brought about by dramatic incident and not through philosophical concept.

It is clear that in all three plays there is continual conflict and ambition, and whilst in Agamemnon there is little psychological progression or hope for future generations, in Troades the world is one to escape from through death. However,

in Thyestes where delusion and paradox are paramount, Seneca has portrayed a world of unparalleled evil with a complete lack of moral order. In this milieu, crime seems destined to continue, and there can be little optimism for the future.

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